

## THURSDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2009

The Speaker, Rt. Hon Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 09.58 am.

Prayers.

### ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Planning & Aid Coordination; Foreign Affairs & External Trade; Commerce, Industry & Employment; National Unity, Reconciliation & Peace; Environment, Conservation & Meteorology; and the Members for Ngella, Temotu Pele, Central Honiara, West Are Are, Lau/Mbaelelea, East Makira, Temotu Vattu, Shortlands, and North West Guadalcanal.

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**55. Mr Oti:** to the Minister for Culture and Tourism: Can the Minister inform Parliament whether the development of the Tourism training course had been finalized and on offer at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education in 2009.

**Hon GUKUNA:** May I first of all thank the Member for Temotu Nende for showing a lot of interest in this very important sector.

Yes, I can confirm that the courses were long been finalized in fact in February this year and they been offered at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and now they are running for the second semester.

**Mr Oti:** I thank the Minister for the response. Supplementary question is the Minister able to confirm to Parliament the number of enrolments so far. Now that the course is now on at the College the number of people that have enrolled in this course and whether or not the Minister can also confirm those that coming from the industry from the management of tourism operators and those that apply in individual basis with no backing from the industry. Thank you Mr Speaker.

**Hon Gukuna:** Thank you Mr Speaker, the initial intention was to have 20 students but because of the demand of College applications were plenty, College had to increase that from that 20 and now we have 33 students being enrolled in tourism and hospitality studies at the College. Out of these 33 the Ministry

subsidizes the fees of 10 students the other 23 they are unfortunately, due to limited resources in the Ministry they have to finance their own cost. We will try and do better next time if we can all agree, if this House agreed to give us little bit money we can try and give as much as assistance as we can to collect more students who were very keen to take up tourism.

In terms of the breakdown I am sorry Mr Speaker, I don't have the breakdown as to where these people came from but if you like which I really should have, I can provide it to the Member later today but at the moment sorry I don't have the breakdown of where the students come from. Thank you.

**Mr Oti:** Yeah thank you very much. 10 of them were obviously those who would like to get this type of training but are not yet in employment perhaps so hence the support that the Ministry is giving.

Supplementary question to that Mr Speaker, is that, what is the basis for the consideration by the Ministry for making this awards whether I mean fully funded or part funded. What is the basis for the consideration by the Ministry for qualifying the applicants?

And secondly Mr Speaker, part of my first supplementary question I think the Minister did not respond to it yet, in terms of industry participation of sponsorship of its existing work force that basically I think that information if the Minister would also confirm too. What ever the Minister's response may be perhaps additional to that would be what about if the Ministry is encouraging the current operators that are in the tourism industry to participate in this so that it can relieve the Government in sponsoring the students.

**Mr Gukuna:** Again the criteria used is with the responsible officers in the Ministry and I actually try to keep away from this because some of my close relatives they also apply and none of them got it and I purposely distance myself from the criteria because I don't want to influence the decision.

However, the criteria is well specified in our papers and I again I don't have those criteria but I supposed the criteria would include something like keen interest of the industry, must include some questionnaires. But Mr Speaker, I don't have that.

In terms of industry participation of course, we have been doing our very best in this industry participation and also trying to get some sponsorship and that we have not been able to successfully do that. As you remember last year we are also carrying out some industry training outside of the College courses, we conducted 6 or 7 last year, and that was the bit we did last year, initially to try and induce training, industry participation in tourism and hospitality training.

Of course we had a lot of interest last year. We had a lot of operators they come in and also send their people to this training. I suspect part of their interests or that huge intake we took last year was because it was done for them free. This year we had to move into start charging some fees and maybe that creates a bit of constrain to them from sending more people to these courses. Thank you.

**Hon SOGAVARE:** I thank the Minister for clarifying the question, and that is in relation to the criteria that the Minister is trying to explain here.

I would like to express it this way. I think one problem of training programs of this country has been training just for the sake of train which there is no I guess a set plan or the objective of the training that we do. I just want to ask the Minister since he is not involved in the criteria and so forth, what is the opinion of the Government in moving away from this practice of training, just for the sake of training to have some more focused approach to these trainings so that the people we are putting out come out from the courses fully utilized in doing something that really moves this economy forward rather than finding them walking on the streets. What is the thinking of the Government on this?

**Hon. Gukuna:** I would like to thank the Honorable Leader of Opposition for this very important supplementary question. The training undertaken last year was actually a very quick one, realizing that there has not been any training for our waiters and our barmen in the whole country for the last more than 20 years. It is true what we did last year was just a very quick one, and to try and sharpen the behavior or the service deliveries, person to person of our waiters and I guess you could say that it was no long term thinking. It was just something that we just bring up because we recognize on the spot that we just have to at least provide the training. But in terms of long term development is in fact this is why we push for the establishment of the college courses. Any long term achievement in terms of proper service, proper person to person contact in terms of delivering hotel and hospitality service will have to be properly plan. I think for the first time we are starting to do that and the courses that the college gracefully offers to us is part of that long term. Of course we will continue to do our best to try and put in place a long term development system that will enable in the long term our tourist operators. Particularly those who provide services to our tourist and our visiting friends to take a more long term approach to that. And in terms of government as the leader of opposition asked. Yes, I guess you can say that that is why the Government is committed to establishing the school at the college. Mr. Speaker I might as well while on this training also stated that we are also looking for funds to establish the school of tourism and hospitality at

the college. Again funding is always a problem even though we recognize the importance of training in the centre. But we are doing our best; we have in fact completed the design phases of this attempt to set up the school but is subject to a lot of things. And one of them is financing, I'm sure if we can get the Government to do a little bit more commitment. We will go along away into addressing our long term need. The long term need which we really need in getting our operators and our service providers to approach people, their customers in a more acceptable method.

**Mr. ZAMA:** There are existing operators in the country. The number of hotels are here, as you walk in, I may be a little bit out of date but the service is provided by those people there. The people that were supposed to be serving the public or customers or clients sometimes is poor or below average or really well below expectation. Now the training that the Minister mentioned about industry training or may be the sectors, I don't know what kind of training he mentioned but we need to improve on existing services, existing operators need to lift the level of services of the existing operators. What kind of industry training is the Minister talking about, industry training for the people that are still not operated or the aspiring operators or industry training for existing operators? And who conduct these trainings, the officials in the ministry that do not have any operation experience or those that are already on the field, thank you?

**Hon. Gukuna:** I'd like to thank the Member for Rendova/Tetepare for this supplementary question, a good question. In terms of training, of course Mr. Speaker we are doing our best but that's not enough. We try to do our best within our means and that's how much we can do as we had done last year. These comments that these people are providing poor services is not my comments, it is the comments from the Member for Tetepari and Rendova who always want to say sensational things in here. We have a lot of respect for the operators even though they have a lot of limitations. Even though the Ministry have a lot of limitation, we have a lot of respect for what they are doing. And they are the ones that will push tourism forward in this country. Not in the way as we saw, what we did last year, we provided how to bring your plate when you sit at the table. We try to train them on how to talk to you nicely, we try to train them on how to be prompt in attending to you when you sit down. These are practical things as the Member for Rendova/Tetepari point out. Yes, we may be still very lacking in achieving our objectives, what we have done simple to start but the honorable member should know that quality in anything is not something that you achieve in one go. Is a journey you keep on improving,

improving, improving even though what kind of field you in? You say your professional you will still need training. And surely in tourism dealing with people – people who have minds who think, who criticize you will never get it right in your first round. So you will keep on try to improve – improve and we will if we have the commitment. We will try to improve and one day we will provide the splendid service and the Member for Rendova/Tetepari will get to appreciate what we are starting but I want to emphasise and that is the starting last year. We did that within our means we wanted to do more but our means could not allow us to do that. But I just also want to say Mr. Speaker that this year we plan to carry out five trainings. We still haven't done that because we are having difficulties in terms of meeting the needs to carry those. Or the least is that we are keep on postponing but we will. In terms of who is doing the training? No, it is not me who is doing the training? Not my staff, even though my staff is involved or has been in trying to guide the teaching process, the training process on to what the Ministry is trying to achieve. But in terms of doing the actual training on the round it is been done by professionals, people who train specifically to carry out this sort of training. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. OTI:** Yes, thank you Mr. Speaker before the Ministers response to the last supplementary question. In relation to what the leader of opposition raised earlier on. In regards to the question of this training and to be training for a specific purpose and for them just to do any training and then you find a job Mr. Speaker. I just want to get the confirmation on from the Minister because in his response he also made reference to the funding that the Ministry offers. If we are looking at our budget this year Mr. Speaker, the allocation of \$1 million was for the development of the that course which means perhaps the material. Material and the curriculum for the course. In regards to that as well as the Minister has also made mention, development of the school of tourism like in college. So on one hand the allocation of the ministry is for two things. one and this is for the Minister's confirmation. One is for the development of that school, infrastructure part of it. Secondly, one for the software part and that's the course material and so on and so forth. In relation to the course materials, for the development of the material how engaged are the present operators who have the hands-on and experience of what is their requirement and therefore in putting the development of particular courses at the College. There are only two things here, and this is the money that is allocated, for the Minister to confirm that part of it is for the development of infrastructures for the school and materials and so on, and secondly whether part of the money is for the development of materials for them to use as teaching aid and lastly but not the

least whether the same allocation we use also for the sponsorship of the 10 students who are qualified as the Minister had mentioned.

**Hon. Gukuna:** In terms of the first part of this question where he ask for the type of people we take. Of course we just don't go out and pick Tom, Dick and Harry from streets and bring them in. We have a criteria and we also have a lot of contacts with operators.

In terms of that money yes let me just go back a little and say that the courses were developed jointly with the University of Waikato. The program is made up of 10 units, certificate in tourism and hospitality and of that 10 units, 5 of them are electives which are provided by the college and 10 of them are related directly to hospitality and tourism studies. The money that have been used I can confirm in fact just to develop those units and the curriculum, it cost the Ministry just a little closer to half million dollars so its not cheap, it is very expensive so that's a big part of the money that we have, was to try and visit University's in fact my staff went as far as ANU. They saw some material, they went to Waikato University source some expertise and they came up with some deals for them to help develop the curriculum and the courses, and we are pleased that we have come up with something that is going to be very important. So part of the money was used for developing the curriculum. And of course I can confirm that part of that was also used to assist the students who have been very fortunate to get our assistance from the Ministry. We want next year to be able to increase assistance so that we can also offer some more students this same assistance. Just for the sake of those who are interested in doing this study at the college, the application for assistance by the Ministry is going to be put out around September for next year.

Mr. Oti: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I have no further supplementary question and therefore I would like to thank the Minister for his response, including responses to the supplementary questions.

**58. Mr. OTI:** to the Minister for Infrastructure Development: Can the Minister inform Parliament of the progress made in the completion of the following road construction/improvement project all of which are under this years budget development estimate.

- a. The Haevo-Visina-Koregu road
- b. The Kaivanga-Kolomola-Koge road upgrade
- c. The Mbabanakira road improvement projects
- d. The Poisugu Komate road

The first two are on Isabel and the third and fourth are on Guadalcanal.

**Hon. SOFU:** Mr. Speaker this is a very important question which the member is concern about the progress on the implementation of the development budget of the Ministry of Infrastructure development not only for the member of parliament but it is important in the sense that the people in those two provinces they want to know the progress of this very important road development.

The answer I will give is, Haevo-Visina-Koregu road and Kaivanga-Kolomola Koge road they were given out to a contractor by the name of Red Devil company. The Ministry's tender board awarded this contract. Those two road they are in the same ridge and so its wise for them to consider only one contractor which is the Red Devil, to carry out that work in terms of mobilization. Kaivanga-Kolomola-Koge road suppose to be finished now then because of the rainy season in our country, the expected time is little bit delayed but we supposed to finish the work. So we were anticipating Kaivanga road to be completed might in the month of August. For information of this house the Kaivanga road has now reach Kolomola only the strip that is to reach Koge is left. And the part of the road that has been completed is about 15 km. And the part from Kolomola to Koge is 6 km so in total it is 21 km. After they complete the Kaivanga road, they will immediately move and do the Haevo-Visina road. That road is an old road which was built by manpower in the past. And the Ministry is believed that as long as we go there and the weather permit us maybe for the last four months we should complete this work and the road is about 13kms and that is the roads in Isabel.

The Babanakira road and the Poisugu road is in the south Guadalcanal and the area is very important, we do not do any work on it yet. The Ministry is in the process to go and carry out the verification on the report which a private contractor has done for those two roads and I would like to inform Parliament that we are waiting for a little bit of money, it is already submitted to the finance, and we were expecting maybe sometimes next week they will go and verify this very important infrastructure once the funds are released.

The budgetary provision under the 2009 development budget, if you look at the budget there it is \$500,000 each, which is very small. Both roads are about 7km. I want to thank the Member of Parliament for South Guadalcanal too for the allocation of \$1million from the 2008 livelihood in addition to what is in the current budgetary provisions of the 2008 Development budget.

**Mr Waipora:** There is a piece of road from Buala via Guguha Community high school and then all the way to Gozoruru. Is that road completed or not yet? If you do not know that road then Member for Maringe/Kokota his place is in Buala. Can the Minister explain that to us.

**Hon. Sofu:** Yes, we are still working on that piece of road. Actually, first grading is already done, and we are looking forward for the completion of the road after the grading work and the finishing job.

**Mr Agovaka:** I too would like to ask a supplementary question to the hard working Minister for Infrastructure.

In terms of priorities sir, how does the ministry prioritize its road infrastructure. I would have thought Mr Speaker, sir, that in terms of peace building in the light of what happened recently in 2000 that in terms of peace building and rehabilitation of our people, I would like to call upon the Minister the special road from Marau to Kuma these people are very affected. And they were really affected during tension too. In fact the wharf at Marau was blown up. These are infrastructures Mr Speaker and we are talking about roads and so this road from Marau to Kuma. Can the Minister assure me that he will prioritize this for his next Development Budget sir because it is not mentioned under Development Budget for this year 2009?

**Mr Speaker:** That is a new question altogether but the honorable Minister may wish to inform.

**Hon. Sofu:** Thank you Mr Speaker. I know that it is new question but I will inform Parliament regarding his concern.

That is a very important question. It is not under the Development Budget but then the Minister understands that is a partnership with AUSAID Programme and they will carry out that road in Marau to Kuma.

**Mr Oti:** I thank the Minister for the assurance he has given us. In regards to respective roads on Isabel and the contract that awarded to a contractor, which has already progressed on one of the two and shortly it will complete the other one. I want to know sir what is the contract price that was awarded to the Contractor for these two projects, either on a case by case basis or both of them as a package because of the one contractor and the two roads are on the same island?

**Hon. Sofu:** Thank you sir for that important supplementary question asked by my colleague member of Parliament for Temotu Nende. If you can look at the Development Budget in 2009, it spells out very clearly for Haevo-Visena-Koregu is about \$1m then Kaevanga-Kolomola-Koge is \$3m. I am sorry, I do not have



that package but certainly I will get my officers to give the information and I will give to the Member of Parliament concern.

**Mr Oti:** That supplementary question was in relation to that package for the minister to confirm what Parliament was being informed of the right information in terms of the award because of that amount \$1m respectively for the two projects on Isabel. Can the Minister confirm whether it was the Ministerial Tender Board who made the award or was it the Central Tender Board knowing of course that the limits for Ministerial Tender Boards will be \$500,000 or less? Anything above that would have to go to the Central Tender Board? So I would like to know what Board considered that in the light of Financial Instructions requirements where this decision is made for and what falls under the armpit of Ministerial Tender Boards and which ones to go to the Central Tender Board?

**Hon. Sofu:** I would also like to thank my colleague member for Parliament for Temotu Nende for the supplementary question. Obviously, any amount that exceeds \$500,000 certainly it will be considered by the Central Tender Board. And so with regards to both, sir, I confirm that they were considered by the Central Tender Board.

**Mr Oti:** I have no further supplementary question and so I therefore would like to thank the Minister for his response.

## **BILLS**

### Bills – Second Reading

The Constitution (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2009 (*Debate commences*)

**Mr WAIPORA:** I thank the Opposition Leader for allowing me to have this opportunity to contribute very briefly on this very important Constitution Amendment Bill that Parliament is dealing with right now.

First of all, I must thank the honorable Prime Minister and his government for bringing this amendment of the mother law of this country so that Parliament can see the amendment that is intended to be made to our Constitution.

I will speak the minds of the people of Makira and the Province of Makira and I do not want anyone to read me as I am sort of an islandism. No, I am the voice of the people of Makira in this Parliament, I am the eyes of the people of Makira in this Parliament and I am the ears of the people of Makira. I think it is timely for me to talk on their behalf, especially when we are talking about the

mother law of this country to tell this Parliament the wishes of the people of my Province and my island.

When the late Solomon Mamaloni and I were assigned by the leaders of Makira to divide the island of Makira into two, we have been looking for five constituencies for the island of Makira, and the sixth is Ulawa and Ugi. We implemented the decision of our leaders with the Council then and we divided Makira into two, big Makira into two; East Makira and West Makira and Ulawa/Ugi. Those things were done in 1974 when the late Mamaloni was a member of the Governing Council then. We were assigned to do that job at that time. Therefore, we said at that time that we will have two seats first and then gradually get to six seats within the Makira and Ulawa islands. Prior to 1993, we asked for two additional seats for big Makira by the name of Hanuato'o. During that time we fought for two constituencies. The Boundaries Commission then did not give us instead it gave another one for Temotu and that is the Vattu constituency. The people of Makira today are still longing for this one to come.

Three Members of Parliament before I came in have been pressurized by the people of Makira that they must get another constituency. When my people know about this amendment they said to me that as their MP who talks a lot in Parliament I must fight for them in Parliament. This is my time in West Makira. We then created the Central Makira constituency and it happened that I was the second Member of that constituency before the present colleague Member. I gave him the place to come in so that I can go back to my own constituency.

Sir, there are mixed feelings here, amongst us here as I understand it. I am not going to argue on any academic legal interpretation of this Bill because I am not a lawyer but a politician. I am a politician and I decide on what I intended to do and it is up to the legal boys to sort out my decision whether it is wrong or right. Whatever interpretation you can make on the amendment is beside the point as far as the MP for West Makira is concerned. I can only voice here the voice of my people of Makira and that is they want a new constituency.

Last year I was the only one who was very vocal in asking about additional constituencies and the honorable Deputy Prime Minister replied to me and said the government is working on it now. And so I am happy that you are working on it now.

When I look at the Bill itself, I am not fussy about it because it says here that the objective of this Bill is to order the Constitution to increase the minimum and the maximum number of constituencies for election. Nothing more nothing less! Therefore, as a member of the Constitutional Review Committee, I must admit that I was the only one who did not agree with the Committee on these disagreements. Because I know that they said no to it. But for us to pave the way we must provide the vehicle for the Constituency Boundaries Commission

to ride on so that it can do its work to bring its report to us, and that is when we will be on heat, and not this time. We must provide a house for them, we must provide a room for them, we must provide a vehicle for them. Or do you want them to produce a report to reduce constituency numbers?

As I said I am speaking the minds of my people and they want it, and I have already been working with the Boundaries Commission. Even though you might be angry with me but I have already been visiting that office for many times now because before you come to Parliament you cannot defeat me, I want my constituency to be established. I heard that some people are very fearful of the economy. Those of you, who are economists, better put away your economics. Like the late honorable Kinika once said that economics is one plus one equals two. Those of you who are academics can go ahead exercising your economical terms. For those of us who are not academics we can only look at what God has put. We, in Makira God has divided us up into different ethnic groups and that is why during the time when we sorted out the constituencies we have already set out mind that whether population or what we do not mind. If you say we are not producing enough then that is God's fault because He has not given us resources. Why doubt about money all the time? Money is in our hands. It does not matter how many constituencies we may have, God will provide.

I think we must not have mixed feelings. Let us all support this Bill and allow it to pass so that we are not fussy about it. We must not come here to play politics but speak out what our people wanted. I talked very strongly because I used to work with our big men before too where some have already died and some are still alive and we have another one sitting down there who is our boss now.

I do not think we should spend more time on this Bill because it is just a simple Bill, creating room for the Boundaries Commission to fulfill its obligation under the Constitution, which says review after every 10 years. But what is it reviewing when there is nothing being reviewed. I think the only review is to reduce.

I am sorry about this side of the House but I am speaking my mind now. You cannot pull me by the nose. The government cannot pull me by the nose and this side of the House cannot pull me by the nose. I always stand to my principles and conviction. That is why when you wanted to take me to your side but I refused because I did not trust your leadership. I want backbenchers and Ministers to support this Bill. Why are I am hearing you having mixed feelings. There are mixed feelings, as far as the Makira/Ulawa Province is concerned this Bill is important for them; no more no less. It does not matter whether it is 2000 or what is beside the point, but our area in Makira is difficult. The weather coast

of Makira is a very difficult area, and that is why we need an additional constituency so that we can represent the people living in that difficulty area.

East Makira has a population of 11,000 people. I have the figure here. West Makira is also 11,000 people and so what are you talking about.

East Honiara has a population of 20,000 people and Central Kwara'ae is about 15,000 people. I think this Bill is very simple as far as I am concern and it will not hurt anything. It can only hurt politics; politics is the only thing it will hurt. We do not know what will come out from the Integrity Bill and the Constitution No. 3 bill but this is straightforward.

I thank the Government for bringing this bill; it is a very important bill. We must pave the way for the Constituency Boundaries Commission to do its work. What is the report for that we are arguing about? What sort of report are we to argue that must be produced to us before we can look at the bill. The procedure is like this; if the Boundaries Commission and Cabinet are working together the report would have already been attached to a Cabinet paper that would have been submitted by the Minister for Home Affairs, I do not know. But that is the procedure, and if we want that information that is the argument. That is our argument. We are saying that the interpretation here is like this and that. I think it is after we pass this Bill before we should argue about the report. That is how I understand this. I do not want to bore the House but I must say that I do not have any difficulty at all with this Bill. With those few remarks, I thank you very much and I support the Bill.

**Mr. GHIRO:** I too want to join my other colleagues to contribute briefly to this very important Bill. I should not contribute this morning but last night when I left the Chamber and went back lots of people came to my house and questioned me about this bill. Some were asking how many constituencies are we going to pass and so we had a discussion and I told them that everyone in the chamber are confused because they debate this Bill as if it were the Commission's report.

This is a straight forward bill and is simple. This Bill is only asking us to open the way for the Boundaries Commission to start do its work. This is the context of the bill as to how I understand it. But when I listen to the debates going on here, some were talking about the distribution of wealth. We have gone in advance in our debates. It is important for us to debate the context of the Bill because when we debate in here, those people outside will be confused if we are not talking about the right things in here. This is what happened to me last night in my residence when a lot of people came and asked me what is going on. I told them that there are no boundaries yet. The Bill is only asking us to open the way for the Boundaries Commission to do its work. But a lot of people are

confusing us. That is the reason why I stand up today to make this clarification on this confusion.

As the MP for West Makira stated, the Bill is still to come. I call this bill phase one, and phase 2 is when you are going to throw your arrows in here and it is that time that you are going to debate like some of you are debating now. Let us not confuse the public. Many times we debate outside of the context of bills, and we can mislead our people, the nation by doing this.

My understanding of this Bill if I can put it right on the floor of Parliament here is that this Bill is like John, the Baptist who comes to pave the way for Jesus to start do his work. This is exactly what is Bill is doing here. The illustration I am putting across is to help you understand what this Bill is for. This Bill is not asking us to debate the distribution of wealth or which area is populated and so on. It is not asking us to talk about those things. It is only asking as to make way for the Boundaries Commission to start doing its work. This is phase 1, phase 2 is going to come later and that is when you will start talking about your wealth and your populations in the constituencies. That is when you are going to talk about those things and not now. The Bill here is only asking us to give way for the Commission to start doing its work. It is a very simple bill but when we debate it in here we are confusing it. Let us not confuse our people. We have to put things right and that is why I stand up to talk at this time.

My understanding of this Bill is that let us support this Bill because as my colleague MP for West Makira said if the Commission cannot increase the boundaries because this Bill does not allow them then reduce it. He is telling the truth because the only work the Commission would do is to reduce it. So let us make way for the Commission to increase or reduce the boundaries. This Bill when passed will allow the Commission to do its work. The second phase of it will come later, and that is the report of the Commission and it is that time when we will debate, shout and do all sorts of things in here, but not now. That is what I would like to clarify because many people came to my house and questioned me and so I have to make this clarification. I told the people to listen out today because I am going to make this clarification on the floor of Parliament.

With these few remarks, I support this Bill.

**Mr. SOPAGHE:** Thank you for giving me this opportunity to contribute to this very important Bill moved by the honourable Prime Minister to amend Section 54 of the Constitution to allow for the minimum number at 50 and maximum number at 70.

I see this amendment as straightforward according to Section 54 of the Constitution. But listening to some of the debates that have been made so far, we have gone too far from what Section 54(4) of the Constitution is saying.

The Amendment is very clear, and that is to allow the Boundaries Commission to make recommendation to the Parliament for additional boundaries in any province to be included in any election time. And it is up to the Parliament whether to approve or reject the recommendation. This is how I think what Section 54 of the Constitution says.

Whilst I acknowledge this Bill, I have no reason why I should not support this Bill. But let me make a few general observations in debating this Bill. We have passed a good numbers of bills in this House, and some of these bills are just amendments, which needs money to implement them.

I think all Members of Parliament should go and talk to their people to allow their land for investors to develop them so that all constituencies in the country are developed and contribute to the economy of this country. We can double up the revenue of the country and then we can talk about increasing the constituencies and increase the livelihood allocation for the constituencies.

Today some of the constituencies enjoy receiving funding from the government and through revenue some of the constituencies have developed. This is a concern to my people where developments have been since the colonial time serving this nation and yet there was no recognition from the national government until today. Our roads are badly damaged, our rivers are destroyed by developments, no proper water supply from the government and so we ask the government to help look into our needs but there was no response. This is a very big concern to my people and as alluded to, we have contributed a lot to the economy of this country. Therefore, I challenge all Members of Parliament to ensure they solve their problem of land dispute and allow investors to develop their land.

Another concern I would like to raise is that I want the government to focus more on the productive sector. As chairman of the CEMA, I can assure this house that 80 percent of our rural people are surviving on these two commodities; cocoa and copra. Cocoa and coconut, I can also assure this Honorable house that these two commodities are exported every month, which provide foreign revenue to the economy of this country. Therefore, I ask the government to increase funding allocation to these two commodities in the next budget in 2010.

Before I conclude, I on behalf of the chiefs, church leaders, women and children of North Guadalcanal Constituency would like to condemn the burning of the head office of the GPPOL Company. I ask the responsible authorities to look for those who committed this criminal activity and bring them to face justice. I want the Government through its responsible authority to discuss with the GPPOL management to look into some of the concerns of the landowners

through a MOU on some of the concerns by the employees on salary and housing. With this short contribution, I beg to support this Bill.

**Hon. SOGAVARE:** I too want to contribute to the debate on the motion on the second reading of this Bill. As you have already heard from the debates of some members of this side of the house, we allow for a free mind. We allow for everyone to speak freely according to our own minds because it is a matter affecting us, our people and our constituencies on how we can better lead them. In that regard, we have allowed for a free a mind. I hope that is the understanding as well of that side of the house. I have heard some government backbenchers also expressing a few serious reservations on this particular Bill. I think it is within that spirit that the motion before the house is to be addressed by this side of the house.

The Bill has only one objective, and that is to increase the minimum number of constituencies from 30 to 50 and to increase the maximum from 50 to 70. We can argue it anyway we like it in this house, but the final analysis boils down to adding 20 more politicians at the national level and a potential maybe 60 more at the provincial state level. I think the issue that we really should be focusing our debate on this morning is not everything that most people have already talked about in here. I salute those who have expressed some serious reservations on this Bill.

I think the issue here is, if we want to confine us to this Bill, this Bill is about adding more politicians and that is the spirit I want to focus my debate on. I respect everything that is said by Members who have spoken in which they have already suggested that their constituencies must be split. And as rightly pointed out by others they are dragging in issues that we should wait to discuss when the report of the Commission comes showing which constituencies are going to be split before we can kill each other in this House debating that. Right now, I think the principle here is that we need to seriously debate the principles of adding more human beings called politicians to the system. That is the subject of the debate here.

I have, openly on several occasions, expressed my opposition to this thinking of adding more politicians in the system. I believe, and as I said we are speaking openly in here that this country does not need more politicians. This is true on every point that Members of Parliament who have spoken on this Bill have used to justify their support on what this Bill is trying to do. I must reiterate that point again.

What this country actually needs right now, with all due respect, is committed, principled and corrupt free politicians who stand to duty though the heavens fall. That is what we need right now in this country. Politicians who do

not have grasshopper legs who see greener grass over there and jump. We need politicians who take their work seriously. We need politicians who put the interest of this country first. We need politicians who are not only statistics in the government but active contributors to the formulation and shaping of development strategies and directions.

There is a big difference between quantity and quality of politicians. The former is what this country needs more. The sad and unfortunate truth is that there are better Solomon Islanders out there, maybe on the streets or somewhere who are fit to be in this House but the system is shaped up to allow very little room for the making of sound and rationale political choices by our people. That locks out a number of good human beings who are supposed to be here, and probably more serious than every one of us who are sitting down here.

On statistics, the Deputy Prime Minister, of course, took the pain of trying to convince Parliament by making comparison with other Pacific Island countries. Unfortunately, the statistics did not help him on the argument that he tried to place on the floor. And as a matter of fact the numbers only prove the opposite. Apart from Papua New Guinea that has a provincial government system, all other small Pacific Island countries, especially the Polynesians that he used as examples, have very simple political structures.

Based on the rationale that he has put before the House, PNG, in fact, should have more but they have only 109 national politicians for a population of 5.3 million or even now 6 million. This is because they have a provincial government system with elected politicians, human beings called politicians. I guess what I am trying to say here is that we cannot isolate the provincial government system from this exercise. We should not.

The provincial government system is an integral part of the political decision making machinery of this country and therefore for us to be totally oblivious to their existence is irresponsible. Furthermore, it only reflects very badly on this Parliament and probably justifies what people have been saying, writing and talking about us as self-serving.

As a matter of fact, the current political thinking that is driving this policy continues to aggravate the mistake of distancing the provincial government system as a level of government in Solomon Islands and therefore part and parcel of the country's political decision making process. Right now, there is a great abyss between the national government and the provincial government in that they are regarded only as agents. And the way agency should work, if it works the way it should work, we should see big things happening in the rural areas and in our provinces. But the problem now, in fact, the reason now is that since the establishment of the provincial government system in this country, governments have not allowed the provincial government system to work. The



provincial government system has relied on a very centralized system in the collection of revenue and major decision making processes, and so they basically just sit down and wait for the time the national government will look at their needs. Later on I will touch on the direction this country is moving and, I guess, express my disappointment with the fact that we forget very easily. National politicians would not, and in most cases even afraid to work with members of provincial assemblies. We distance ourselves so much. In fact, when this whole idea of trying to look at this bottom up approach and look at institutionalizing constituencies and trying to involve provincial members in these processes came up, lot of Members expressed serious reservations. But we should not. Those people will run against us in the next election. And so there is always this next election, protecting me and mine. There is always this distancing. The policy before us is basically aggravating that; distancing more of them. Let us talk about that we are just concern about the national parliament. For that reason, I think this policy suffers from that false fear. Unless we tackle that problem head on sooner, we will continue to think and act irrationally as manifested in the Bill before us.

The rivalry for power will continue to occupy political agendas in the country and in the end do you know who the true losers are, the innocent people in whose names we hypocritically advance these policies. "People want it, we have received many letters". Well my advice is, do not give brandy to a person who is drawly drunk.

The argument that we must wait for the Federal System of government to address the concerns we have been raising is not the answer. In fact if that argument is to be accepted then it is all the more reason for this Parliament, not to irresponsibly increase the number of national politicians or politicians in general now. We are moving in a certain direction and we are still moving but we jump to do other things that we should not be doing yet.

It is clear that this Parliament, and I am saying Parliament because it is no longer Opposition versus Government on this issue but it is every member of this Honorable House, this Parliament is totally lost in the jungle of confusion because we are certainly not in tune with the direction this country is going; we are lost.

In case we forget, Solomon Islanders or so it appears to be wants to pursue and adopt a state government system modeled on federalism, and all common sense suggests that we cannot have both. What I am saying here is that if we continue to increase national politicians when we are also talking about adopting a federal system of government, and it looks like we are losing directions. These are both things that will eat into the ability of government to actually cope with the system. In case I am not aware of any changes in policy, are we saying now

that we will no longer pursue the state government system? Is that what we are saying now?

For those who argue that economic consideration should not be an issue in this case, I think we must think again. The truth of the matter is that this country is incapable of running two huge parallel government systems; it cannot. You can have a small and lean federal government with selected national portfolios like fiscal policies, monetary policies, foreign relations, police and national security and defense and national coordination and pass the rest of the government's service delivery responsibilities to the state government. That should help us to decide, like the number of politicians that we should have at the federal level and the number of politicians that we should have in system at the state government level. In this case, I think the area of growth in terms of politicians and administrators should be the state government, not the national government, no. Is that still the thinking or have we changed our minds?

We are trying to look at some statistics that the Deputy Prime Minister has said. Right now, as I look through these figures it is very interesting. Choiseul Province has 3 Members of Parliament and 14 ward members, total 17. Western Province has 9 Members of Parliament, 26 ward members, a total of 35. Isabel Province – 3 Members of Parliament, 16 ward members, a total of 19. Central Province has 2 Members of Parliament, 13 ward members, a total of 15. Guadalcanal Province has 8 Members of Parliament, 21 ward members, a total of 29. Renbell Province has 1 Member of Parliament, 10 ward members, a total of 11 politicians. Makira/Ulawa Province has 4 Members of Parliament, 20 ward members, a total of 24 politicians. Malaita Province has 14 Members of Parliament, 33 ward members, a total of 47 politicians. Temotu Province has 3 Members of Parliament, 17 ward members, a total of 20 politicians. Honiara has 3 Members of Parliament, 12 ward members, a total of 15 politicians. That brings us up to the total we know very well; which is 50 Members of Parliament, 182 provincial politicians and this comes to 232 total politicians.

If we take the population projections, which I am sure is now sitting at about 500,000, and that will be confirmed by the national census that will soon to happen, and I agree with the figure that the Deputy Prime Minister has put across that if this is rounded up, right now one Member of Parliament, a politician people ratio is 10,000. At the provincial level per politicians people ratio is 2,747; one ward member looks after 2,747 people. If that is totaled up it comes to 2,155 people to one politician. And I am not grading whether it is national or provincial politician. But one politician to the people is 2,155. And if we go down the scale and increase the number to 55, 60, 65, it changes as it goes. If we go up to 55 we are looking at 9,000 and 90. Of course, the politicians/people relations at the provincial level remains static at different

levels here, but it does change the overall total politicians/people ratio. If it increases to 55 the politicians to people relationship is 2,109. If we go up to 60 the number goes down to 8,333 and it reduces the total to 2,066. If we go up to 65 it is going down to 7,692 and it reduces the total people/politicians relationship to 2,024.

I guess the crucial question that we need to ask is, is that not enough? Is that not fair enough already and all we need to do is move boundaries? Maybe not necessarily increasing politicians but boundaries are moved and, in fact that is what the Commission is called; it is the Constituency Boundaries Commission. Maybe it is just moving of boundaries so that the people are inside. We are neatly placed at about 10,000 per Member of Parliament.

In saying that, I think the unacceptable truth here is that even if you take all the criteria set out in the Constitution, you can still accommodate them within the present number of politicians at the national and provincial levels. If we allow the system to work as it should work, there is no need for more politicians to do all the things that the government bench is trying to argue about and justify. Sorry not only the government bench but the entire Parliament is debating and trying to justify why this amendment should be approved. It would really matter if the number per constituency is 250, 2500 or 25,000.

If the system is designed in a way that recognizes the various delivery mechanisms, Members of Parliament do not have to become project directors and managers in our constituencies. I think that is the bottom line and the truth about all of these things. Instead, they will spend more time attending to national issues. No wonder why this county is not going the way we wanted it because people are bogged down in areas that they should not really be bogged down in. I guess what I am saying here is that we are creating our own problem on this matter. We create a make belief situation that without more politicians, this country will not progress. That is simply what is coming out of this House. We must be joking. We must be really, really joking. The problem of this country is not that it does not have enough politicians. No, rather a proper organization of the system we currently have to achieve the objectives that we are trying to do in allowing the system to work.

The other issue that I want to share with Parliament is the likely effect of any more increases in constituencies or politicians for that matter in provinces that already have more Members of Parliament on issues of fairness and undue influence on policies that have national significance but can be frustrated by regional interests. This is where probably the concern raised by the Minister of Agriculture comes in, and I think he has a point.

Right now the distribution, for discussion sake, of voting power in the House is like this. Malaita Province – 28%, Western Province– 18% and

Guadalcanal Province – 16% percent, and put these three together, these powerful blocks together, they control 62 percent of the power of decisions in this House. Different combinations if Malaita and other provinces is 66 percent, they control 66 percent right there. You move the other provinces with Western Province and they will immediately control 56 percent. You move it to Guadalcanal they will immediately control 54 percent.

I do not want to dwell more than is necessary with this issue, except to say that we may be sowing seeds of disunity and revolts if we rush this decision when we are still moving on certain directions here. We want to move this way and we forget about that and we jump onto a policy that might put us in a very awkward situation. Of course, the obvious response of smaller provinces would be to increase more numbers. That is the answer to this one so that it is balanced. I do not believe that is the direction to go. I would suggest that Section 54 be further looked at amending to expand the criteria that are set out there. We may need to look at giving appropriate weights to the votes cast by small provinces on issues that have national significance.

I guess what I am saying here is that this matter needs more thinking to consider its effect on the ongoing efforts of restoring peace, national unity and reconciliation. These are crucial policies that are incorporated in the development strategies of the country since the country collapsed in year 2000. The effort since that time is bringing the country together or holding us together and not to come up with policies that would threaten unity. We need to set the foundation for a united nation and not sowing seeds of disunity because we are concerned more about the protection of our seats than the good of this country and its people, and I will elaborate on that later on. We need to come out of the mentality that we own these seats in parliament. That seems to be one of the greatest fears; otherwise I lost in the next election and so the constituency must be split so that I have the chance of coming back. That is what is discussed around that. That is not right. If this is the mentality we have in approaching this bill then we are heading in the wrong direction.

As far as procedural issues are concern, Parliament, in my view, can comfortably rely on the legal advice that the Attorney General has given for the purpose of processing this amendment through the various stages of the debate until, of course, a contrary opinion is made if parliament so desires.

Now having said that, it needs to be appreciated however that the concerns raised by a number of speakers and, of course, the Constitutional Review Commission on matters of procedures is more involved than merely questioning the constitutionality of the processes.

As we know, the Constituency Boundaries Commission is the independent commission that is constitutionally mandated to advise Parliament

based on its independent assessment about changes in constituency boundaries and therefore the processes as to their legalities aside, the concern is really an expression of a desire to see that all actions that will lead to the increase in the number of politicians in this country should be subject to the independent advice of the Commission to Parliament before we even talk about increasing the minimum and maximum numbers. Unfortunately, the action proposed under this Bill does not require that advice as advised by the Attorney General. I think this is where a few, very few responsible, I guess, Members of this Members are expressing serious concerns. How can Parliament be left in the cold concerning an issue that begins the process that will, at the end of the day, directly increase the cost of government. That is the concern that some Members of Parliament have. And I need to make it clear from the beginning that the issue of concern here is the decision of Parliament to increase politicians, the maximum number of constituencies to 70 because besides the action of placing a permanent contingent cost on the annual budget, it is made without having regard to the political and social development the country is currently going through. In this regard, I simply cannot believe the statements I heard from the Minister of Police and National Security that Parliament should not be concerned about the cost of implementing policy decisions, especially this one. That is very, very irresponsible.

The concern about cost is a major issue for Parliament. Parliament must be seen to be concerned about cost if it is to be considered as a responsible Parliament. In fact, we set up a whole ministry to do nothing but concern about cost, the Ministry of Finance. We set up posts within the government system; permanent secretaries who are called accounting officers and they are concerned about nothing but costs, how to minimize costs and maximizing the benefit that comes out of incurring government expenditures. So cost is a fundamental issue and so for us to just rubbish it just for the sake of winning argument in this Parliament is not on and is totally irresponsible. And I think the question that comes our forcefully again here is how can a so called responsible government jump the gun on this matter without us really giving it careful thought. The public, and especially those that, I guess, bear the brunt of financing the government budget through their taxes are fully justified to question this government's nothing but politically motivated actions. And you can argue till kingdom come on this matter and it is nothing but it boils down to politically motivated action. Nothing short of that! Why the urgency as if parliament will dissolve and no parliament will ever exit in this country?

The concern of the public is that it simply does not match the government's claim of fiscal responsibility. It does not match that. The determination of the government to get this amendment through despite its own

assurances that it is not intending to increase the number of parliament seats in 2010 is even more confusing. Just listen to the debates that are going on yesterday and the day before. We hear Ministers standing up and actually said that on the floor of Parliament. And I am making reference to the statements by the Minister of Public Service and the Minister of Culture of Tourism yesterday.

**Hon. Tozaka:** The Leader of Opposition with due respect to you please do not sensationalize the debate. I think what we have said here is that matters in relation to the economy and things like that are matters for Boundaries Commission to make. That is the point Ministers are making here. We understand the things you are saying. We cannot just allow these things to happen. We still have the Boundaries Commission to ....

**Hon. Sogavare:** Point of order. If he is contending my statement on what I said that he said then you better rule him to stop there and not to try and debate with me on the issues I have raised.

**Mr Speaker:** Could we allow the honorable Minister to complete his comment? Are you finished?

**Hon. Tozaka:** No, I am not yet finished. Let us not confuse the public, is what I am saying, the Leader of Opposition. I think what we are saying is that the matters you are raising we too are equally very concerned about, and that is finance. We are concerned about that. We have already raised this in Cabinet and in fact some of us have been corrected.

**Hon. Sogavare:** Point of order. He is raising a point of order when I made a statement from what I noted from him in here yesterday. I heard it, it is word for word from your mouth and I raised that in that context. He is debating with me on issues that I raised. He needs to confine his point of order on saying that 'I do not say that'. That is what he needs to say.

**Hon. Fono:** Further point of order. The statement by the Leader of Opposition indicating that it is the government that will increase the number of seats is misleading. It is Parliament that will finally give its approval to the recommended number of increases. As a leader he knows this very well. Thank you.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister, please complete your point of order and we will allow the Leader of Opposition to continue.

**Hon. Tozaka:** Leader of Opposition, you have further personalized this by calling our physical body. Be careful about that. Do not say 'your mouth'; just say that you have said this. Just be careful about such statements. I will let you to talk, continue with what you are saying but I just want you to be careful that what Ministers are saying here is rightly portrayed. Do not confuse the public.

**Hon. Sogavare:** I find this very, very interesting because I do not know where else these statements come from except from the mouth. And the point by the Deputy Prime Minister, just hold your horse. I am not saying that the government is increasing. I am now moving to the process how that would happen, and so you listen out and just hold your horse. I find it very interesting that it is causing a lot of needles to prick their seats, and they are very uncomfortable when the Leader of Opposition talks about this issue.

Before I was rudely interrupted I was making reference to the statements those two Ministers have made yesterday. If that is not the intension, if the intension is not to see more politicians added to this parliament next year then the question is why the urgency? Why the urgency? The action seems to suggest that there will be no more parliament after the dissolution of the Eight Parliament. My point here is that if it is not urgent then leave it the next parliament to deal with it. That is the truth; we need to go down to the truth. I find it rather, rather amusing to hear Members who have spoken to this bill trying to tell Parliament, and in the process even contradicting themselves in this House that Parliament should worry about the increase because there is no urgency in implementing it. They must be joking. It is amazing, really amazing what towing the line in politics can do to a free moral agent; it reduces a person to nothing more than a robot.

The position is like this, and it is carried in subsection 4 of section 54 of the Constitution, and it reads as follows "Parliament may by resolution prove or reject the recommendations of the Constituency Boundaries Commission, and if so approved, the recommendations shall have effect as from the next dissolution of Parliament". In other words, as soon as parliament increases the limits, parliament will, in probably the next sitting, receive a recommendation from the Constituency Boundaries Commission to increase the number of constituencies, which will certainly be approved by parliament because of the vested interest that we already have that Members of Parliament have on the increases, and this will formally establish the new constituencies, which will have effect in 2010 after the dissolution of the Eight Parliament. If we do not do it now but wait until after parliament is dissolved and then we do in the next sitting then we are talking about the next one before this would happen.

At least the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Provincial Government, the Minister of Lands, the Minister of Agriculture, the Member for West Are Are, the Member for Shortlands, my Deputy Leader, the Member for Lau/Mbaelelea, to name a few are honest, very, very honest on what they are saying on this floor of Parliament. They are very, very honest. They believe that there will be and must be increases of Members of Parliament in 2010 and probably affecting the areas they are representing in this House. That is very, very honest. Why beat around the bush and try to hide it by saying, no, it might not happen? You might not use it at all! Those kinds of statements do not make sense at all.

The Member for West Are Are told Parliament that people have been crying for new constituencies and so Parliament has the obligation to give them additional constituencies, and like all who spoke to this Bill directly associated increase to development.

There is a saying that goes like this: "You do not give an alcoholic brandy if you know it is not good for him". This is where Parliament's responsibility comes in. We must look at those issues. Weigh all circumstances, the directions we are going, political situations, the environment we have to look at, where we are going, what is happening before we come up with decisions.

Before I sit down, I want to dispel some fallacies. Fallacy No. 1 is that the proposed constitutional amendment will improve parliamentary democracy. In fact, more specifically, the proponents of this amendment submit that this objective will be achieved through the reduction of the number of people that one Member of Parliament will represent in Parliament. There is a serious misconception here. As a matter of fact, this argument is premised on the misunderstanding of the workings of the representational role of Members of Parliament in a parliamentary democracy, and worse still the assumption of democracy that a Member of Parliament literally represents each and every people on a day to day basis. This is a fallacy.

The truth of the matter is that Members of Parliament symbolically represent the people of the constituency in Parliament, not literally. This may sound strange to some people of the constituents in Parliament, some people in here but it is a fact. If Members literally represent his constituents in Parliament as argued by the proponents of this Bill, nothing will move because the level of consultations and approval that a Member of Parliament would be required to get before a decision is made would be simply overwhelming, it is totally impractical.

You do not have to look very far to prove this point. All bills and policies discussed and passed in this Parliament since we become a nation were never discussed thoroughly with the people or not at all. Just look at the number of



bills that come here. We do not go and consult the people about these bills. But every debate is made in the name of the people that Members say they are representing in this House. This is what is referred to as the assumptions of democracy, which in actual fact is not different from maybe the worst title is 'dictatorship'. The only difference between our system and that of a dictatorship regime is the way in which decision makers are chosen. Under the democratic system of government decision makers are elected and under a dictatorship regime they are handpicked and appointed.

What I am saying here is that the number of people that a Member of Parliament represents in Parliament does not make any difference. It can be 60, 600 or 60,000. This argument is pathetic and must fall.

Fallacy No. 2 is that the proposed amendment will guarantee fair representation. Again, this argument is premised on the reasoning that the people's voice would be fairly represented in Parliament if the number of people represented by a voice in Parliament is reduced and fairly distributed. The argument that I first made also applies here. It is absurd to argue that the effectiveness of Member's representational role in terms of representing the people's voice in every decision made will be different if he represents fewer number of people. In fact, under our system how many people a Member represents in Parliament has no bearing whatsoever in the effectiveness of the performance of the Member of Parliament, neither does it improve the value of a vote taken on a matter discussed and voted on in this Parliament.

As I have already said whether the number is 60, 600 or 60,000 the Member of Parliament would only fairly represent his people when he actively participates in the business and corporate function of Parliament not by the number of people he represents in Parliament. In that regard, I am really appalled at the disappointing level of participation by Members of Parliament. It does not properly demonstrate it when we are trying to bring in more politicians in here and we are behaving this way. What kind of picture are we putting across to the public? They would say they want to bring more people into that House and they would be just like this. That does not present a good picture. I would probably change my mind if I see a very vibrant hardworking parliament. That is not what is happening, we are not seeing that in here.

Probably I have expressed it already but how can one possibly argue the issue of fair representation when the present level of participation is very, very poor. You have the opportunity in here to represent your people in the functions of Parliament. I believe and I have stated my position that increasing the number of politicians to achieve fair representation is simply absurd. It does not make any sense.

Fallacy No. 3 is no taxation without representation. The duty of Parliament to make laws for the collection of tax or imposition of tax is not determined by the number of decision makers in Parliament. Not at all! In other words, Parliament must still make that law irrespective of its numbers. As a matter of fact, Parliament has no obligation whatsoever to seek the views of the people when it comes to the issue of imposing tax on its citizens. It is a serious statement here but that is a fact. We need to understand and accept that taxation is actually the price that somebody has to pay for being a member of a civilized society. As a matter of fact, if there is an inference here that the people would only be legally required to pay tax if they are fairly represented in Parliament then that argument must fall, it must fall purely on legal grounds. It must fall. Again, even if a Member represents 60, or 600 or 60,000 it does not make any difference to the duty of Parliament to make laws for the imposition and collection of taxation.

Sir, there is another very disturbing statistics in regards to this matter. Only about 10% of the country's tax paying population pays 90% of the tax revenue in this country. This is equivalent to the population of only two constituencies, and most of these taxpayers are residing in Honiara in the constituency of West Honiara, Central and East Honiara.

In the setting of Solomon Islands any increase of Members of Parliament would make zero, zero impact on the revenue collection capability of the country. Therefore, any inference that tax revenue would improve if we increase Members of Parliament would be wrong. That argument must also fall.

Fallacy No. 4 is the increase in the number of seats in Parliament would improve the people's right to express their opinion in Parliament. The right of the people to express their opinions, and again the first arguments that I talked about on this thing about democracy also applies here. What I want to say here is that the right of the people to express their opinion is rightly done through Parliament by Members of Parliament symbolically representing the people of the constituencies. But it would not be right, and in fact misleading to say that the Member of Parliament would not be performing that role effectively if he or she represents more than the ideal number. That would be clearly, clearly absurd, and not make sense at all. When you stand up here you are just expressing your views. You do not need to think about how many people you are representing in here, I guess, to urge you to say what you want to say in this Parliament. Instead, as I have said, the effectiveness of that role is determined by the effectiveness of the Member of Parliament without having regard to the number of people that he symbolically represents. His willing and active participation in the corporate functions of Parliament is what really matters in this regard and not by the number of people he represents. Now the way to do

that is to improve the institutions of Parliament to facilitate that process. Improvement, I guess, in reorganization of the committee system, for example, of the house would go a long way in achieving that objective.

There are some arguments as well being put forward, and the argument that Parliament must not interfere with the decision of the Constituency Boundaries Commission to increase or decrease constituencies is seen to be what was also stated here and the comments that some people are making.

The concern here is not about interfering with the decision of the Constituency Boundaries Commission. As a matter of fact, it is the very opposite. It is about relying on the independent advice of the Constituency Boundaries Commission. But this matter, as I have said, is resolved and there are some understandings on it but I want to mention this only in passing no more. The opinion, of course, tended by the Attorney General aside, what we are suggesting and indeed contend is that Parliament would be creating additional contingent cost centres without having the benefit of a detailed recommendation from the Constituency Boundaries Commission supported by detailed analysis of the relevant data that is relevant only to this particular issue that we are discussing on the floor of Parliament now.

With due respect to the Constituency Boundaries Commission, Parliament has all the right to be concerned that the action of Parliament in increasing the minimum and maximum number of the number of constituencies may influence the decision of the Constituency boundaries Commission and then we would really have the problem of Parliament, I guess, of influencing the decision of the Constituency Boundaries Commission.

What I am contending here is that it is the passing of this amendment that would certainly influence the decision of the Constituency Boundaries Commission and not the other way around. What is even more worrying is that the government did not hide the fact that there are active consultations with the Constituency Boundaries Commission on this matter and so out goes the issue of independence, it is very serious. Parliament has all the right to question the rationale behind the increase in light of that revelation.

The point about Parliament debating the recommendation of the Constituency Boundaries Commission will only make sense if the recommendations are not tainted by politics, which I doubt it very much, and rightly so.

I seen the concern raised by the Member for West Are Are in supporting this Bill but he expressed some serious concerns and reservations on that particular area that if the CBC has to make an independent decision then let it be an independent decision. But from what we are hearing there are some serious consultations and story already about them. This is only suggesting or seems to

be saying that the bill is constitutional and so it must get the support of the House. I beg to differ. That is a very cheap argument. This debate is not all about constitutionality but rather it has more to do with the marriage of the government's decision to go ahead in getting the Bill passed by Parliament amidst very heavy criticisms.

Just like any bill, parliament reserves the right to reject it if it is not satisfied with the way the government is pushing it against, of course, all indications that the House may be uncomfortable with it. I submit therefore that the argument about interfering with the decision of the Constituency Boundaries Commission must be rejected by this Parliament.

There is also an issue that was raised in facilitating winning candidates to get more majority votes if we go that direction. This argument seems to suggest that by reducing the number of population in a constituency, the winning candidate would be guaranteed a majority vote of a total voting population. This comes out straight from the first contributor of this Bill on the government side. I fail to see the truth in this argument. The increase requested would be implemented under the current electoral first-past-the-post system and so there is no guarantee that the winning candidate will get the majority of all the votes in the constituency. This argument is probably trying to link this amendment with the propose Political Party Integrity Bill where some form of preference voting would be introduced. If this is the case then there is all the more reason for this Parliament to be concerned. Not because we do not support the idea of political stability but the crude political intentions and aspirations that may be driving it.

There is also the argument that the proposed increase will facilitate an effective majority rule by the mandated people. This argument must also fall on the grounds that the increase number of politicians will still be elected under the first-past-the-post system.

It was also raised in this Parliament that increasing the number of constituencies in Parliament is increasing the number of politicians to address people's needs. I think this too is really, really not right. In fact, all Members of Parliament who spoke to the debate on the Bill associate it with the strategy to distribute development. This thinking is, I guess, further consolidates the strategy of directly involving Members of Parliament as another group of service providers. This is something that we must, in the long run, get rid off. It is something we have been always saying in here; distance Members of Parliament from funds that are going to the constituencies. That is what we are saying. But the way discussions are happening in here is that that is really justifying the increase because when we increase the number of constituencies more Members of Parliament will come and more funds will come for politicians to deliver. We are just making a mess of ourselves. We are confused here because on one side

we are saying we must distance ourselves but on the other side we are saying that we must support that, in fact this fully justifies the reason why this Bill comes to Parliament. I think the whole idea of fair representation is really hidden in this argument. That is, if the constituencies are reorganized and increased more development funds would be available to the province because of the increased number of constituencies. That position contradicts the argument that the reorganization would incur very small additional cost to taxpayers and aid donors as advanced by that side of the House when the Leader of the Independent Group is putting this loud and clear on the floor of Parliament.

In discussing the issue of costs, we are not only talking about Member's entitlements, rather we are talking about the entire package that is available to all Members of Parliament that would be elected.

Sir, I think I have spoken my mind on this Bill. As I said earlier on when I started this debate, this side of the House agreed that we will have an independent view on this Bill. Each one will make his own statement and his mind on this matter because it is a matter we feel is not really opposition versus government but it is an issue that affects all of us, and so it is just appropriate that both myself and the Prime Minister have acknowledged, I guess, these dissenting views expressed by members in their camps.

The Member for East Are Are did make some very, very a firm position on it. The Member for West New Georgia/Vona Vona also made some serious reservations on how he sees this Bill. That is healthy. It is a very healthy way of discussing this issue because it is something that affects all of us, and so we allow a free flow of mind in debating this Bill before we come up to some serious decisions on it.

In saying that, I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak my mind and to provide some advice to this Parliament as usual, always. I take my seat and I reserve my vote at this point in time. Thank you.

*Sitting suspended for lunch break at 12.11 pm*

Parliament resumes at 1.59 pm

**Hon ABANA:** Thank you for this opportunity to also contribute to the debate on this important Constitutional Amendment Bill 2009.

I would also like to thank other colleagues who have already contributed to this amendment bill in this Honorable Chamber. At the outset, I would also like to thank the Honorable Prime Minister for bringing the Bill to Parliament for our deliberation.

Sir, I acknowledge the intention of this amendment Bill because it provides for an accommodative scope for this piece of legislation to address current needs or demands when necessary. Some of the intentions are to ensure appropriate representation of our people in this Chamber given our geography and also our increasing population. In this regard population will be a major influence in benchmarking new increases in this section of the Constitution. The last census was in 1999 and the next one will be in November this year and the outcome of this census will be critical in coming up with any necessary decision on this matter.

Whilst this is exciting politically, I would also like to remind us of the situation our country has been through recently and more so in the past 12 months at the domestic front. It is common knowledge the physical stress on the government's revenue generation capacity due to decline in forestry revenue, a source which the country is dependent heavily on .

The global front is the impact of the global financial and economic crisis which has resulted in the worldwide recession. Solomon Islands is no exception and indeed its impact is already being felt domestically with the Central Bank reporting on a slowdown in the economy. However, I believe the current situation will pick up in the near future. In the meantime, the government is taking all necessary efforts needed to embrace our economy against this shock. For instance, from the Development Budget, the government focuses on investments that will contribute positively to our economy such as our export earnings, employment generation and labor based approach in implementing donor-funded programs. In addition, the government is pursuing serious discussions with our development partners on budget support initiatives as the way forward for such economies as ours. The government is responsible and will continue to assess and monitor this situation and its impact on the economy on a regular basis to ensure maintenance of service delivery to our people. At the same time, this amendment is also important so that the people of this country are better represented in this House and therefore with the assurance that the Bill when passed in principle will, in due course, be guided by the outcome of the National Population Census, and certainly recommendations from the Constituency Boundaries Commission. In addition, it would be even more prudent to have the implementation or rather the awards of the additional constituencies spread over the next 20 years, especially in such current economic climate. As the government continues to assess and monitor the economy in close collaboration with the Central Bank, I am confident it will implement this Bill in a responsible and cost effective manner as well.

With these few remarks I support the Bill.

**Mr KENGAVA:** Thank you for giving me this opportunity to also add my voice on the debate of this Constitutional Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009.

First of all, I would like to commend the bold move made by the Prime Minister on behalf of the CNURA Government in tabling this bill, which requires a two third majority to get it passed. This Bill, in my view, is really a test on the solidarity of the government and the result will focus on what we expect in our deliberation on other constitutional bills, like the Political Party Integrity Bill and the Constitution Amendment No. 3 Bill. I think it is very important that debate on this Bill is given three days so that Members in this Chamber can share their views before they make their final decision, I am sure today.

Sir, as a representative of the people of North West Choiseul, I believe that I am mandated to say what I think is best for this country and for my people. I want to also say that the purpose and the objectives of the Bill, and if I may quote is "to alter the Constitution to increase the minimum and the maximum number of constituency for elections of Members of Parliament". With those objectives and purpose and with the explanation or clarification made earlier by the Attorney General, I am satisfied with Section 54 of the Constitution that Parliament has the right to amend Section 54 to enable the Constituency Boundaries Commission carry out its constitutional duty.

Looking from the CNURA Government's point of view or the government of the day's point of view, I think the intention is reflected in the objective of the bill, which is to allow for increase, thus the need to amend Section 54. Also by amending Section 54, it would then enable the Constituency Boundaries Commission to carry out its obligation, and is to review electoral boundaries. I think it is a requirement that the Constituency Boundaries Commission has to do its job. I do not see this bill as a matter of urgency but it is just a requirement in order to allow the Commission to carry out its duty. Therefore, whether this Bill is passed or defeated entirely depends on this Parliament, but the government is doing the right thing in bringing this Bill so as to meet the requirement of the law in order for the Constituency Boundaries Commissions to carry out a review on boundaries in the country.

Listening to the various arguments put forward by various speakers, including the Leader of Opposition, the Leader of Independent, the Member for West New Georgia, the Chairman of the Constituency Boundaries Commission and others, in my view the strongest argument against this Bill can be seen in three areas. The first is that it would create too many politicians resulting in over governmentation of this small country of ours with just over half a million people. Lest we forget, today constituencies are important entities that represent people in Parliament then we would think we are over governed. Today constituencies are becoming very important entities for political representation in Parliament.

Not only that but in Solomon Islands, representatives, which are Members of Parliament have another role, and that is providing development funds to the grassroots people. Maybe the work we have done or the experiences that we have seen, I think I am in support of what the Deputy Prime Minister has said that probably constituencies would be seen as better development agents for the national government than the provinces.

If people are concerned about having too many politicians governing this country, what is stopping us not to bring in a motion or another law to stop us from increasing the number of politicians in this house? That is the way forward. At present although we have so many politicians at both the provincial and national levels, they have different areas to look after. The ward politicians look after their wards and national members look after the constituencies, which include wards in them.

The second strongest argument I can work out from the debate is costliness in the increase of Members of Parliament, which will probably lead to us not being able to afford it as it would become too expensive for the country during these hard economy times. I do not want to go into detail on the costs because that would still to be seen if the Constituency Boundaries Commission makes recommendation to increase the number of constituencies. What I would like to say is that for such a bill as this that directly meets the interest and the desire of our people, and that is to have more representation in parliament or in provincial assemblies, in my view, it is the duty of the government of the day to make sure it finds funds to finance this. That is what the government is for. It is there to do its best to find money to meet the cost of bringing services and development to its people. The government is not there to look at its own policy interest. If the wish of the people is overwhelming and strong in this nation then the government of the day, whichever government must do its best to find the money to meet costs of even the increase in Members of Parliament. I think a good example of this is when the government of the late Solomon Mamaloni sees the need to improve the congestion of roads in Honiara sourced funds from outside through the Kuwaiti fund to build the four lane road that we are now enjoying today. That is a government that recognized the needs of its people and did its best to find money to meet the cost.

On this note, I must also congratulate my wantok colleague, the Leader of Opposition that during his time as prime ministership saw the need to pay compensation to people affected by the ethnic tension, which led to the government of the day, although has no money, but did its best to get money through a loan from the Exim Bank to meet the needs of people at that time. This is what I am trying to say. If this is good for our people then it is the obligation of the government of the day to find money to fund. That is what we are here



for. If we depend on donors to meet the cost then that is our weak point. I think it is for us to look at our needs and what our people want.

The cost the increase in Members of Parliament may have on the country is not disputed by me. I know there will be costs to that, but what I want to say is that we should not be afraid of that. It is the duty of the government and parliament if they see the wish of the people to increase constituencies in this country.

Thirdly, sometimes there are fears that probably the increase in Members of Parliament or constituencies may affect funding from our good friend, the Republic of China which footed the RCDF, the Millennium Development Fund and the ROC Micro Fund. I think that should not be our concern because that is a matter for our good friends, the ROC. I think Taiwan has proven all the time that it is a true friend indeed. We leave it them to consider whether they want to continue funding or otherwise. Our concern here is if we increase the number of Members of Parliament then how we can find more money for the livelihood development funds.

With those few points, I feel it is important that we look more at the interest of our people. That is what I want to raise here. I think the arguments for the Bill, in my view, far outweighs the opposing views because of the changing situation that we are facing in the country since independence, which is 30 years ago now.

There are only a few points I want to raise in my short contribution. First of all the importance of constituency is probably the reason why people are starting to look at constituencies as better channels of receiving development assistance or to actually meet the various socioeconomic needs that people have in the country. One is that the constituencies, as I have said earlier on, is where people of Solomon Islands are represented in Parliament. In my view, a simple view, to be a representative of a constituency for a term of four (4) years is not restricted only as a representative here in this chamber. Even outside of this chamber when you go down to the villages you represent people in the various gatherings, in opening of schools, clinics, in sports days, in hard times and bad times, in conferences, when you are there you are representing your people. I think representation therefore is wider than just talking in this chamber. That is why I said that to restrict ourselves only as a representative of our people in this Parliament, yes we may have too many politicians. But if we believe that representation in those four years is not only representing our people as a legislator but we represent them as their leader in the community and in the various places then I do not think there are too many politicians in this country.

Sir, today we have a problem situation in our country. Comparing ourselves to other countries in the South Pacific, I think, for our situation there

are certain problems why we probably need one or two more representation or Members of Parliament or more wards in this country. This is based on the growing population we have in this country and also, I think, insufficient road networks and infrastructures, better communication whereby even if there are less Members of Parliament in a province, you can cover that province very quickly with better roads and better communications. In Solomon Islands, we are far, far from achieving that. Those areas not reached by roads will feel marginalized if no member of parliament visits them. I know that is happening to constituencies in the provinces, especially provinces that do not have roads, better communication people sometimes feel left out when they are not visited frequently. At this point in time when the development of Solomon Islands is still not yet to the level that we can say that Solomon Islands communications, road infrastructure is at an advantage situation, I think there is need for more representation by people in this country.

Further to that, I think our nation is also made up of many islands of which we cannot change, and because of the scatteredness of our islands, I think it is only reasonable to have more representation, especially the remote areas so they can be better represented in Parliament.

The third strong argument I want to raise here is that a government that is for the people will try its best to accommodate the wishes of its citizens. On this point, I think we have already learned that the Constituency Boundaries Commission has already received submissions from provinces, from individual groups, from the private sector and so forth. If people are raising concerns like these then I think it is our obligation to look at it.

I think it is from this point of view that the government is giving the opportunity to parliament to consider the wishes of the people for more constituencies and therefore opening the way, and it is up to the Constituency Boundaries Commission to recommend to us before we make the final decision here.

The second to the last point on the argument for this Bill is that the constituencies at the moment are getting, let us say \$2million per constituency and people expect to see and feel the effectiveness of the RCDF, the Millennium Development Fund, the ROC Micro Fund, and also the Livelihood Development Fund, not naming the various funds available in the various Ministries which are very difficult for people in the constituency to access. When people experience in knowing that very little is reaching them, they will think the answer is to have more Members of Parliament so that such a funding would be shared well to them. Currently, the sharing basis of all these funds, whether it is a small constituency or a big constituency, we are equally shared the \$2million each year. I therefore think that more constituencies would naturally be seen by

people as the answer as they would also have the opportunity of receiving this \$2million. Otherwise if we do not want to increase the constituencies then we must change the formula of sharing these funds, so that bigger constituencies with more population receive much higher funding than the smaller constituencies.

Apart from that, this is the thinking of our people today, and we cannot change this unless we take out of the equation the RCDF, the Millennium Development Fund, the ROC Micro Fund from the direct responsibility of Members of Parliament. Remove those funding and may be the attitude of our people in the villages and the remote areas would change so that they understand that it is not because we are Members of Parliament that we receive these funding but they were given to us by the government. But at present this is how people see it and we cannot change this unless some of these funding are removed from the control of Members of Parliament.

Sir, therefore the Bill itself is a good instrument, in my point of view, put to Parliament with good intentions. It is a way of creating a new political direction for this country for better representation, especially for the remotest parts in the provinces that cannot be reached because of poor roads, poor air services, poor shipping transport and so forth. It would also enable MPs to better attend the populated constituencies in this country. At the same time I also see this Bill would indirectly support the coming bills like the federal constituency bill and also the political party integrity bill. These bills need each other in order to work for Solomon Islands.

In concluding my short contribution, I see the concern raised by other MPs of the need to take certain measures to control politicizing the creation of constituencies in the future as something we should take note of, although the Bill receives a lot of support from us. In supporting this Bill, I want to suggest a few points. I think we should not stop here in our debate and support of this Bill but we should look more to the future as expressed by those who really caution about this Bill.

Firstly, I think there should be control measures in place now to define the criteria of creating more constituencies in this country. Maybe an amendment to the Constitution is needed in order to put the maximum where it cannot be reviewed because now it can be reviewed after 10 years. Why not change Section 54(2) of the Constitution so that boundaries can only be reviewed after 20 years. I think this is a measure we can suggest rather than arguing about it so much because it is here and there. Let us put the practical measures so that instead of after every 10 years it is after every 20 years so that there is continuity and maybe the stability of having so many seats after 20 years and then we will see how it goes. May be by that time we would have better roads, better air services, better

shipping services and so we might stop there, there would be no need to increase the constituencies.

Secondly, I think the power of the Commission to decide on whether we should increase constituencies after every 10 years should also be looked at if there are no measures put in place. Here, I am suggesting may be a separate Act of Parliament to be drawn up to guide the work of the Constituency Boundaries Commission so that the review period of 20 years and who should make submissions. At the moment, it is very open and that is why we have problems because all Members of Parliament want a constituency each. Provinces also do their submission, Members of Parliament probably, other groups like the women would like 10 seats in this Parliament and so on; it is too open. I think a new Act of Parliament should be in place to guide the Constituency Boundaries Commission in carrying out its work effectively. I am a member of the Constituency Boundaries Commission and this is an area I see there is weakness when dealing with this matter because the Constituency Boundaries Commission is very open as it makes decision based only on Section 54 of the Constitution.

Lastly, if there is the need to increase constituencies, at the moment, I think, I am in support of my colleague, Minister of Lands that currently there are 10 vacant seats in this Chamber. I think we should look at filling up these 10 seats first before we look at increasing the number. I think this is the way we should go so that there is some control measure in increasing seats in Parliament. If we increase it to 20, probably we may need to change the sitting arrangement in this Chamber and so forth.

Although there are no submissions from Choiseul Province, as a Member of Parliament of that Province I would like to give the obligation to the Province as it knows much better the needs of my people out there. Although as their representative that during my tours and my travels visiting my people there are expressions by people that may be it could have been better if there is one more constituency for Choiseul Province, and if so which constituency should be split up and so forth. That is a matter best left to the people if this Bill is passed and we go back and hold meetings with the people, and only then would we know the exact answer. My advice to the Choiseul Provincial Government is that if they want to increase constituencies in Choiseul Province, they must make sure to work with us three Members of Parliament, consult with us so that whatever decisions we make is agreed to by politicians of the province.

Lastly, this Bill is in line with the government of the day's policy. That is one thing we must not forget. The government of the day has its own policy and it wants to accommodate the people's wish. If this is truly the people's wish through submissions that will be received by the Constituency Boundaries Commission then let the people rule this country. When this Bill is passed, I

want to also voice out my concern, which is also raised by others that let us allow the Constituency Boundaries Commission to carry out its work independently. With due respect to my Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I think we should not go barking at the door of the Constituency Boundaries Commission asking for another constituency. Leave it to the Commission to do its work and let the provinces do their work. I think that would be a true sign of true leadership. Our time is when the recommendation or report by the Constituency Boundaries Commission comes to the floor of this Parliament then that is the time for us national leaders to debate and properly put the matter to rest. With those few comments, I support the bill.

**Mr. ZAMA:** Thank you for asking me to briefly comment on this Bill. I would be very brief because after listening to the debates since Tuesday, Wednesday and now today, it would appear to me that the arguments in support of this Bill do not really get the support because the argument so far posed by those that do not support of this Bill, although few they may be, their words, in my view, over weigh those that are in support of this Bill. Therefore, on that note, I would like to thank the Honorable Prime Minister for moving this amendment to the Constitution. He must have seen it fit to do so, especially at this time of this House that has less than a year to be dissolved and whether people on the streets would see this Amendment as timely or not timely, they will express their views. People on the streets will express their views in ways and forms available to them. But for us 50 Members of Parliament this is our turn to express our views, our concerns and our opinions as well. Having said that I would like to on behalf of my people of South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare and in particular with 100 percent support of the people of Tetepare would want to express their views on this bill.

Some people have used biblical terms in pushing their agenda in support of this bill. Others have used economic terms, others have used accounting terms, others have used sacramental terms and others are sensational. But having heard from both sides of the floor and from all Members of Parliament, one thing I realize is that some Members need to grow up a little bit. We need to have thick skins when raising issues and debate on the floor because issues we raise are sensitive and may not be comfortable to the ears of others. But this is the place where we need to learn.

The argument pushed by the government, especially backbenchers and even the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and all Ministers that this is a simple straightforward amendment to the Constitution with no costs attached to it. When I heard that argument I do not know what to say, whether to laugh or whether to feel sorry for those Members because whichever way they want to

look at it, or whichever turn they would want to take, any amendments or any bills moved on the floor of Parliament, especially this very important amendment to the Constitution will always at the end of the day attract costs, it would attract costs. And so for us to simply push this through because it is a provision of the Constitution and there is need to increase that provision in the Constitution and that there is no cost to it, then why limit the number to 70? If there is no cost to this then frankly, in my view, we should move the upper limit of the Constitution to 100 if there is no cost. Even before this bill comes to Parliament, some constituencies in the Western Province are already separated. Even before the Constitution is amended to allow for new constituencies some constituencies in the West, there are discussions going on in the kitchen that the constituencies are already separated. Some aspiring politicians are already claiming they are winning the seats. A little bit sad.

Whether we like it or not or whether the government likes it or not, there will be costs to these amendments. I think the Leader of Opposition has very well summed that point up. And on the probability of that I do not know whether to support this Bill or not. But for record purposes, as I have said that I represent the people of Tetepare and so I must register their voice, so even though I may support or not support this Bill, it is an important Bill, especially when it is to do with the Constitution, which is the supreme law of this country I must express the views of my people.

I will be speaking at two different angles here. Firstly, I will support this Bill simply because it is to increase the provision in the Constitution, but I will have another stance when the recommendations and the report comes from the Constituency Boundaries Commission. On that note although there are costs to this amendment to this Bill, let us just increase it. But in my view, increasing the upper limit to 70 is still not enough. But like the point raised by the Deputy Speaker, when this Bill is passed and the reports and recommendations finally come to Parliament by the Boundaries Commission, and when we come here to determine the numbers we will have some physical limitations, and I think the Deputy Speaker has raised the point. So far in Parliament right now there are only 10 vacant seats in the physical layout of this house at this time. And if the recommendation that comes to Parliament is more than 10 seats then unless you want extra members to sit by your side or the Speaker would want to have some members sitting by his side then I am not sure what would happen to the sitting arrangement in here. Maybe we can have two houses if we have more than 60 members that we can call the foyer up there the upper house or the upper floor and this one down here we can call it the lower floor. But strictly speaking any number would be restricted to the present sitting arrangements in this house because there are only 10 seats available and vacant in this Parliament.

For us in the Opposition Bench, which is really good because you do not have a choice. May be when the seats are increased the Opposition Bench will be able to have a full bench because you would have no choice whether to come and sit here with the opposition side or you just sit down on the floor. Those would be the options.

I can see that this is a straightforward amendment to the Constitution to provide for an increase to the upper limit so that when the report finally comes to Parliament, we can accommodate those. This is not to say that the biblical terminology used by others that this bill is like John the Baptist is not right. I do not want us to use biblical terminologies to try and convince some of us to support this Bill because whether you use such terminologies, our minds are very clear in terms of what this Parliament needs and what we need to debate. That aside, the question that really begs me to contribute to this debate is that supposing we increase the constituencies whether by one or 10 or 20, to me that is not really the issue. If we are to increase the constituencies when Parliament is dissolved then what we need to really ask ourselves is would the services that people in the constituencies and the rural areas be receiving timely and effective? Those are the issues.

I hate to listen to people using parliament to promote or campaign for their constituency on what they are doing in their constituencies, for instance, Central Kwara'ae, I mean it may good for them, it may be good for the people but we need to also consider other constituencies that are quite far and remote from basic infrastructures, for instance the Shortlands Constituency, Vattu Constituency, Rennell and Bellona, Malaita Outer Islands, the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal and Tetepare. If there are more constituencies what would happen to the delivery of services. It is not really increasing the number of constituencies will see an effective delivery of services. The main thing that should be seriously considered is the cost aspects of it, and a lot of people have said a lot on this.

This amendment is a straightforward amendment but I also feel we should also seriously look at other amendments in the Constitution too. The issue of raising the number of constituencies is not a stand alone issue because when the number of constituencies is increased, there are also other services or institutions that need to be considered too. I think the Leader of Opposition has said that once constituencies are increased the number of national members will increase and definitely the number of provincial members will also increase to cater for those new increases. There will be new provincial wards and the list goes on. So it is not just a matter of increasing constituencies but there are also other cost factors and cost related issues that will come with this.

What we need to be careful about and to take into serious consideration is that amending the Constitution to cater for more constituencies is another way of

looking it. But I seriously believe that the present Provincial Government System, which is in some way a big hindrance to the delivery of services in the constituencies and to people and the provinces needs to be reviewed as well. Because definitely increasing constituencies will increase provincial members and will also increase wards too.

For the last 20 years or almost 30 years ago, with the introduction of this present Provincial Government System, I think there is need and call for the present Provincial Government System to be reviewed. In some areas, the system has been a bottleneck and has been the main hindrance to the delivery of services to the provinces and especially the rural areas. I think the government as part of its constitutional review agenda must also look into reviewing that system as well. This therefore calls for what will happen to the state and federal constitution amendment. Where do we fit ourselves in with this increase?

You cannot rule out that these amendments are not independent when they come to Parliament. There are people who have interested agendas and issues in wanting constituencies to be increased. Every time we talk about independent, an independent commission, an independent review, and independent submissions. Nothing in this world is independent. There are also people that have interest for constituencies to be increased. There is an argument pushed by the Deputy Prime Minister that this review is not only for an increase to constituencies but also amalgamation of constituencies. If that is what he is really pushing for then there is no need for review to increase the constituencies. And I think quite honestly some constituencies are very small to be constituencies of their own.

On the issue of independence, I think there is need to really think hard and careful whether to really push for an increase in constituencies because if the intention is for political expediency in increasing the constituencies then I think it is a wrong intention. If we want to gain political power or just want to be a member of parliament in doing this increase then I think it is a wrong intention. What we need, and I think the Leader of Opposition has said it that this House needs leaders; good, strong, genuine, honest political leaders in Parliament as opposed to strong political opportunists. On that note, we the present 50 Members of Parliament need to really screen ourselves too. Which side we take whether we are truly strong political leaders and are genuine in our agenda to push for more constituencies or we are simply political opportunists pushing for an increase because we want to come back in the next election. The people will judge us on this because if cost is the bottom line for us to consider then I think this is really the wrong time to push for this. The Minister of Public Service will support this, I know.



I know that the Government Bench is mixed up a little bit. The Government Bench is mixed up, because when my learned friend for East Are Are came up very strongly in his argument not supporting this bill, suddenly the Prime Minister called Parliament off. Why? It shows the government is really mixed up in its feelings, views and opinions. They are still divided. On the surface they said they support it but really inside the individuals they are not. Just before I came in they have expressed that view to me and told me not to tell the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister. Most Ministers are still sitting on the fence whether to support this Bill or not. The reason why the Prime Minister called that meeting back on Tuesday was really to reassure Members that if they go against this bill they would find themselves out in the cold. This is unfortunate for the government bench, and I feel sorry for them because some of them do not support this Bill. And I would like to thank the Honorable MP for West New Georgia and the MP for East Are Are for coming out very clear. Like what the MP for East Are Are has said what has he got to lose being the ear and mouthpiece of his people? He has come out very openly on this. Unfortunately some of us do not want to speak and express our views but within us we are still holding on tight. But there is nothing to fear, like all of you have said, and so the MP for Tetepare has nothing to fear too on this amendment. The only sad thing for me is the limitation of the ceiling, which I think should be increased that instead of 70 it should be increased to 100. Apart from the comparisons given by the Deputy Prime Minister, Solomon Islands is different from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands is different from Fiji and Solomon Islands is different from the small atoll Polynesian states of the Pacific.

Solomon Islands is a country full of wealth. Unfortunately we have not explored or exploited these resources and it is also unfortunate too that we have just recently passed the Anti Terrorism Bill, the Anti Money Laundering Bill which do not allow people to launder their money here. That is unfortunate because otherwise this country could be a vehicle for money laundering so that we can build more bridges. That is dirty money used for clean purposes. Anyway that cannot happen now because this Parliament has seen the wisdom of stopping dirty things like that to happen.

Whether we like it or not, let us all support this Bill; let us support this Bill. But we will be awoken maybe in September when Parliament is going to meet again or in November to sit down and look at how many constituencies we are going to increase. I say this because the Western Province has already made recommendations for maybe five to eight new constituencies. And so going at that rate, only the Western Province will fill up the remaining 10 seats and so where are we going to fit Malaita in? Where are we going to fit Guadalcanal in or maybe a new one for Makira or another new one for Honiara? But that is

when we will really look at the cost. And I think it would be that time that the issue of cost will really hit hard on us. I am pretty sure the Minister of Education will come up with more justification on where we are going to get the money. Because already this fee-free education policy will almost deny us to finance the additional constituencies. But it is up to the government. But for those of us who are concerned about cost we will know at that time. Or maybe the Minister for Trade and Commerce will look for more investments. Unfortunately, it is sad for us that this recent happening at the GPPOL will lead to that oil palm plantation closing down. If that is the case then we as leaders, the government, Back Benchers and Parliament must dig deep to look for more investors to come to Solomon Islands.

Having said those things we must be cost conscious because we are now hitting the headlines. People are now talking about Members of Parliament as self serving and a host of other things, so much so that this House has lost its respect and integrity. Over the last four to five years I started to notice a shift in the opinion of people on how they see their leaders. People are starting to come up very strongly on what needs to happen in Solomon Islands. These are all part and parcel of the many influences that are now creeping into this country, which maybe bad or good influences but it is at the end of the day that we would make a very good judgment. I have great concern on the issue of cost, and I need to express it now and I will continue to express it again when the bill on the increase to constituencies come sometime later. Otherwise I would like to thank the Prime Minister and all those who have spoken in support of this Bill. To those who have also raised their reservation of this Bill, let us support the Bill because we will find the money, Solomon Islands will find the money for this. The Minister of Finance is very confident because we have gone through hard times and we have footed those hard times with our own resources and so with this increase in constituencies, I am very positive that we will find ways and means to fund this increase. But just one last thing, I think the government needs to review its free education policy because it is now hitting hard on us. This is not a joke because parents are a bit resistant on this. We may think this is a joke but school authorities are expressing their concerns because parents do not want to pay school fees because they said the Minister of Education has already paid for everything. The Minister, you have a problem in your hands that you need to sort out on this free education policy. Once this Bill is passed you need to rethink, the government needs to rethink whether to push on with its free education policy or it needs to shelve it so that we can reserve some money for this new increase when it comes to Parliament.

But otherwise I would like to, on behalf of the people of Tetepare, thank those who support this Bill and also thank the Prime Minister. I think there is

also one recommendation too before I close that the Western Province has already made it clear because of geographical reasons, not so much population but geographical reason have strongly recommended, and I have been informed that Tetepare will become a separate constituency. With that I would like to render my support to the government on this Bill and thank you very much.

**Mr. BOSETO:** I rise to make a very brief contribution to the debate of this Bill. I thank the Hon. Minister and the Government for recommending to this current sitting of Parliament this constitutional amendment bill.

The policy of the CNURA Government, which I think may cause the strong desire for a constitutional amendment to increase the number of constituency and the number of members of parliament from the minimum of 50 to maximum of 70 should not be only based on over population as some present constituency, although this is an essentially important factor from the point of view of a fair share of our national budget.

I personally perceive that this constitutional amendment bill is reaffirming the centralized system of political and economic democracy, which in my view, is in conflict against or with the strong desires of most of our provinces for a federal system of government. Therefore, I question the wisdom behind pushing or rushing this constitutional amendment at this stage when the term of this present house has only seven or eight months to end its life.

The questions that need to be raised or asked prior to pushing this constitutional amendment bill are as follows:

1. Is this constitutional amendment bill to increase the number of constituencies and Members of Parliament relevant to our scattered traditional nation of Solomon Islands?
2. Would this constitutional amendment bill strengthen or weakened the government's stand for a federal system of government or democracy?
3. Would this constitution amendment empower the natural resource owners of our country to get out of the sickness of dependency on hand outs from overseas donors in order to own and actively support our government, hence reduce our national debts?
4. How can the government reconcile between the regulated democracy at the national level and the deregulated economy for foreign investment and investors of our natural resources at the rural areas?
5. How can the government practically materialize its policy of rural advancement while at the same time building a pyramid structure which, in my view, may increasingly advance serving only the elites and creams

of our nation without due consideration or careful and critical assessment of where we are going locally and globally?

What I mean here is that a pyramid structure that only serves itself cannot reach out to bear the burdens of those who are politically oppressed, economically poor, and excluded under its monoculture.

To increase the number of constituency and members of Parliament from a minimum of 50 to a maximum of 70 can be done without much debate if this road of increasing members of the centralized political democracy would not be producing beggars and more beggars in years to come. Let our history within the next 40 to 50 years witness itself whether our decision to say yes or no to this Constitutional Amendment Bill would bring material prosperity to all Solomon Islanders or to only the prosperity of the elites and their comfort in the years to come.

Let me conclude my short contribution with the following texts from our Lord Jesus Christ. Although the Member for Tetepare had already warned me, I would like to conclude it this way. This is a living word from Jesus Himself whom we confess in this country. He says, "Watch out and guard yourself from every kind of greed because your true life is not made up of the things you own no matter how rich you may be. Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not there is nothing you can give to regain your life." With those few remarks and the living word of our Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you and I resume my seat.

**Hon. HILLY:** I stand to contribute very briefly in support of this Constitutional Amendment No. 2 Bill before the honorable House.

I think it is also the concern and the interest of this honorable House to raise views as to what a representative government is in the Solomon Islands context. The question on how do we form a government in Solomon Islands, how do we regulate our meetings in parliament are all questions yet to be properly resolved in the minds of our people. We opted to follow the Westminster System in that we have an election and a certain number of people are elected to come here and represent our people in the country.

Yes, some constituencies are bigger and others are smaller, but when they all come into this honorable Chamber they seem to have the same status. It is only when the \$2million is divided amongst our people that we begin to say my constituency has 20,000 people and the other constituency there has only 1,000 people. Yes, the amount of people we represent in here might not be important, but it is a question that we must continue to ask so that we see how best we can have a number that is almost closer to each other. At this point in time, some

constituencies are very small and some are quite big, and this is in the Solomon Islands context. I believe it is very difficult for people with a bigger population to service our people properly by visiting them and helping them in their development projects.

In the early days of my membership in this house when I was then quite young and energetic, after every Parliament I went back home and tried to explain to my people at home what we have discussed in Parliament. But my people turned around and told me that there is no need for me to go back home and see them every time after our meeting because they said that they cannot understand the things we talk about in his house. They told me that as long as they can make a few dollars from copra to enable them buy basic necessities needed at home is basically their interest and also their children going to school and access to health services. Since then my trips back home to visit my people were not as frequent as I used to be. But this is the question of representative. Are we representing our people in here? Our people expect us to represent them in our wisdom, in our contribution in making laws in here and in our discussions in this honorable house.

I think this amendment is not only a requirement in our Constitution but it is a question of how best we can try to bring the differences on the number of people we represent in this House. Of course, the Constitution also provides that if an area is small, isolated and very difficult to access, it should also be considered for a seat in Parliament. These are the criteria that have been used in the past in creating new constituencies in the country.

Lest we forget, the provisions in which we are here this afternoon to finalize this Bill before us is that Section 54(2) of our Constitution says that: "As soon as practical after the commencement of this Constitution and thereafter, the Commission may review the number and the boundary of the constituency whenever they consider this to be desirable and shall do so not later than 10 years after they have reviewed them and may make recommendation to Parliament for alterations in the number of boundaries of the constituencies." I guess the last review was done some 10 years ago and I can remember three constituencies were created at that time. I do not know whether it last year or this year that is the tenth year of that review and so the Constitution is asking us to review it again. I think the Commission has been asked. It is that constitutional provision that we are trying to fulfill here. But we have reached the limit of 50. The Independence Order has put the limit to 50 and therefore it would be difficult for the Constituency Boundaries Commission to make any more recommendations because we have already reached the maximum. This Bill therefore comes to amend the number 50 to 70. It could be 65, it could be 60 but a number was picked and it so happened to be 70, to move up the limit. If

the Commission after its deliberations thinks there is a need for an increase then it is this house that would finalize it.

Sometimes we talk about the concerns that we have. I am sure the Commission is aware of the concerns we are raising in this House. Because mind you that if the Commission puts in a bad submission, this house will throw it out. But if it puts in a good submission, which in our opinion is good this house is going to accept it. So it must also work hard because it will be not in its interest if its recommendations come here and we throw it out. It may mean we are not placing importance on the results of their work. I only hope when the Commission gives in its recommendations, it must be reasonable and sensible that Parliament can accept because it is either we accept or reject its submission or report to this house.

It has taken us more than 20 years to fill up this upper limit of 50. I want the upper limit to move up a little bit to 60 or 65 so that some of us if we are still around can reach the upper limit. But when you put it at 70, may be some of us would not be around when we reach this number because it has taken us more than almost 30 years since 1978 to reach 50. So there are lots of responsibilities given to the Commission to submit its recommendations forward, and a lot of responsibilities are with Parliament to consider and weigh out the recommendations properly.

Firstly it is a constitutional requirement and part of this house to open up the limit so that we can hear what the Commission wants in regards to its work, and secondly we must not try to preempt the Commission's work. I am sure its report would be worded out very carefully otherwise it is rejected by this house.

With those few words, I think this is a constitutional requirement of this house to make this amendment to cater for possible changes, and we still do not know what will be given to us.

**Mr. OTI:** Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add my voice to the debate of this important bill, the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009. I stand at this point in time, fitting too, as there are only two of us now in this Chamber who were close to the promulgation of the Constitution, which is yourself, Mr. Speaker, and the former speaker, the MP for Ranonga/Simbo and the Minister for Commerce. In fact, I was trying to get one of you two, who would be the real person we are going to listen to. I made the point to stand up specifically because after the Member for Ranonga/Simbo and the Minister Commerce stood up trying to get some background of where this country has come from in so far as the expectations of our fathers on the intent of Section 54 of the Constitution. Because of that I will limit my short contribution basically to Section 54, particularly in reference to the need to increase the lower and upper

threshold from 30 to 50 and now from 50 to 70. The cost implications and so on and where it will go, we will come to that when the Commission's recommendations are put before the House, and so I will not delve into that. But those who have spoken preempted what is likely to come when the Commission review report is here. They have already signaled to us what the implications would need to be and for us to take note that the arguments come the report review of the Commission in here, our arguments have to be consistent in defending what we are going to pass today if this Bill will go through the second and third reading to satisfy the three quarters required, and not two thirds as stated in the Bill. Sections 46 to 58 inclusive, requires three quarters support in the second and third reading of the Bill.

The intention of the drafters of the Constitution in terms of at that point in time to scope that Members of Parliament or the seats in Parliament or number of constituencies be between 30 and 58, and Section 54 talks about review and it does not talk about increase. That is basically perhaps what we are trying to do now. Increase it, it is not within the intention of Section 54 of the Constitution to increase it. So the review could actually result in reduction or review within the scope and the limits of 30 and 58.

It is like this. In the review by the Commission under its powers in Section 64, it looks at population numbers as one of the most important factors to consider, but at the same time it says, "also the mode, the easy or difficulty in communication, ethnic representation". Those, apart from the principle of population and numbers, these are also factors that need to be taken into account. So in a potential possibility to review, you can actually redistribute the population numbers within if communication is satisfied. For example, Central Kwara'ae has a big population. That is no ground under the intent of this provision for it to increase. In fact we can redistribute part of that population because communication is easy, and so you can offload some to West Kwaio, some to Aoke/Langalanga and the number is reduced. I am not arguing, I am saying that another eye can see it that way too. We are not only looking at this with one eye. What the Deputy Prime Minister see is not necessarily what I see and so I am just telling him what I can see. I am not disputing what he saw, but I am reading. If we can distribute that population within then it can happen if that is the concern. If the population size is the concern then the scope is there and that is why it is a complete section. But now we have taken it to do with an increase, and that is why we are trying to amend Section 54 to leave the threshold because it was never intended as to why did it not mention that if you need some increase beyond these limitations, why is it not included in the first place? That is what I was trying to hear from the Minister of Commerce. And therefore I am just saying that is a possibility if the report of the Commission is

received and we will see the cost factor to it. And the cost factor must be limited to what is under the entitlement regulations to pay for a Member of Parliament, thus the real cost.

I think we must depart from this thinking of the funding that goes through the constituency. I have been consistent and that is why I moved a motion last year to remove the constituency funding from Members of Parliament so that you do not tie into it and associate the cost to your constituencies. The Ministry should have already worked on this.

The Member for Temotu Nende right now does not need the constituency funding to win the election, absolutely not because of a mechanism that has been established. I am glad the Ministry has tried to work along the basis, and I have given a copy of the arrangement to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development. You can look at it because it can work and then the cost factor will come into it, you reduce it. What we will be trying to sort out is what we are entitled to under the regulations that the Parliamentary Entitlement Commission is responsible for. Those are the real costs associated with paying for additional seats. If we are going to offset it, of course; come next year we review the constituency boundaries, increase it but can we reduce the cost of maintaining Members of Parliament. If we have to gain in one then we have to do it by sacrificing in the others, and then we can live within the means. We do not have to scuff around for money that we do not have. No, we use what money we have by shifting priorities within the limits the law is setting, and I think it is possible. I am not against the increase. In fact, Nende Constituency will be split into two, and that will be supported by the government. I will support the resolution of the Commission when it comes here when I see Temotu Nende on it. That is the condition of my support because I am qualified already to have another two more. And I am watching that; if I do not see Temotu Nende on that Commission Report I will oppose it. And that is when the real fight will come. Each one is for himself. That is not good because that is not the intention when we come here and fight for our own cases. That becomes politics then, and not to do with governing of this country. I think that is what we have to come out of. We must stand up here to govern. I stand here first, as a Member of Parliament representing the constituency of Temotu Nende. Second, I stand here as a Member of Parliament of Solomon Islands, and you would have noted that I asked a lot of questions in this Parliament not to do with my constituency. I am interested in what this country is doing for its people. I asked questions to do with people that I do not represent directly in my constituency. I am concerned about the whole country. What happens in one corner affects the others. This Parliament House is round, there are no corners.



To represent people is not an expensive thing but the cost of transportation, yes. It is not expensive to go down and talk with your people. Some of you have never been to your constituencies since you have been elected into this house. What kind of representation are we talking about here? Is it representation of giving money to people? No, absolutely not! That is not what parliamentary representation means. But are we having a hybrid of parliamentary representation system in Solomon Islands? Or a crossbreed of what the Constitution means or intended to what our culture dictates to us? We must recognize this. I am not proposing it is one or the other. We must accept that we are a culture and so we must accept, we must develop according to, notwithstanding there are principles in the system that we have to abide by and at the same time we cannot forsake neither forego our cultural and customs in Solomon Islands. This is Solomon Islands democratic style of its own. There is nothing wrong about that, but we must agree with it. And at the same time to be as equitable as much as possible, we must recognize that representation of our people, particularly if Temotu has one more, give one to Tikopia and Anuta. Vattu cannot have one constituency at this point in time. It is too expensive. Communication is very difficult for these two islands to be part of Vattu. These are the factors that we need to look at. It is not because we want some more to make a balance of power equitable. No, it is to do with representing communities that are isolated. Temotu Nende or Vattu was created in the 1996 review of the Constituency Boundaries Commission.

When I first attempted to enter Parliament in 1993 Tikopia and Anuta were part of Temotu Nende, and I cannot reach those two islands to campaign in a canoe or by road. I have to go by ship. And when Election Day fell in 1993 I was not with 90% of the population. I was stranded out in Tikopia because that is the only time I had to wait for the ship. No wonder I lost in 1993. I have nothing to do with the creation of Vattu in 1997 but at least it enabled the now Member for Temotu Nende to win his second attempt in 1997. I am just telling you the difficulties of some of these small communities. The weather coast of Makira, the weather coast of Guadalcanal, Shortlands, and Rendova is very easy, there is no one in Tetepare yet. These are factors, and this is why I am saying this because when the report of the Commission comes here that is when the real fight is going to come, and that is when some of us who are always last will be always the last. As I have said we in Temotu only got ours from this provision in the last review. In 1978 only two members, the first review increased to 47 and there are only two reviews, the first one after 38 is to 47 and after the 47 members, the second review the three last ones. If the numbers were exhausted then Temotu Province will be the last again. But I do not want us to be the last on this review, we will be the first. Those of you who already have your

opportunity will be the last. Only then I will support that resolution when it comes to the floor of Parliament.

On that note, I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Attorney General especially who struggled really hard to convince the Constitution Review Committee. Time is of essence but patience is important. And I think it was the AG's patience and everybody's patience that persevered in the end that a lot of members were convinced that this is not preempting the work of the Commission, and those two are not exclusively related; one has to come. As the Minister for Commerce has mentioned, there has to be scope. In fact if the provision has been exhausted then what would the work of the Commission lead to? That is why I came with the other option. In fact, yes, even if the limit is there, the other option that is possible is for redrawing of the boundaries so that Central Kwara'ae is reduced, offload some to Aoke Langa Langa, some to West Kwaio and so forth. This is it because you have already reached the limit. In fact, it was not a dead end as you might think. No. The intention of the provision is straightforward. Notwithstanding when it comes to the physical space inside here, as the Minister for Lands and the MP for Tetepare have mentioned to us, some will go to the upper house. But are these tables cast in stones that they cannot be moved? No. These are things we can change but they have to be changed so that the constitutional amendment is required for this purpose.

With those few comments, I support this amendment and see you when the report of the Commission gets to Parliament. With those comments, I thank you.

**Hon. Sikua:** I wish to wind up the debate on the second reading of this Bill, and in doing so I shall make brief responses to contributions made by colleague Members of Parliament from both sides of the house. Also, in winding up, I take this opportunity to thank all colleagues from both sides of house who have contributed to the debate in the second reading of this Bill.

Before I make my brief responses, it has become necessary for me to reiterate and repeat the fundamental objective underpinning this Bill for the benefit of some who appeared to have some confusion about this Constitutional Amendment Bill. But I am thankful also to the Member for Temotu Nende who has done the job for me in making further clarifications.

As I have said when I made my statement in introducing this Bill, this is a very brief but important constitutional amendment bill. The object of the amendment bill is to alter the Constitution to increase the minimum and maximum number of constituencies for election of Members of Parliament. The proposed minimum is 50 and the proposed maximum is 70. To this effect, this

Bill seeks Parliament to amend Section 54(1) of the Constitution. Section 54(1) of the Constitution currently sets the minimum at 30 constituencies and the maximum at 50 constituencies. The objective is simple, as I have said it is to alter the minimum and maximum number limits on the number of constituencies because as all of us are aware, the current minimum of 30 and maximum of 50 have now been fully utilized or reached. In other words, we have hit the ceiling.

In my introductory statement, I also mentioned that the last review carried out by the Constituency Boundaries Commission was more than 10 years ago, and since then there was no further review as required under Section 54(2) of the Constitution for the Constituency Boundaries Commission to undertake review every 10 years.

I also pointed the fact that circumstances regarding the country's demography have changed dramatically since the last review, which made it desirable to make further amendments and review by Parliament and the Constituency Boundaries Commission respectively. In view of the increase in the overall population and number of people in some of our existing constituencies, the Constituency Boundaries Commission has received submissions from a number of provinces, constituencies groups and individuals so far. As I have said in my introductory statement when introducing the bill, so far Western, Central, Rennell Bellona, Makira, Isabel and Temotu Provinces have already made their submissions to the Commission. In the meantime Guadalcanal, Malaita and Choiseul Provinces and Honiara city are yet to do so. However, I am sure that they will forward their submissions as soon as they are ready in the not too distant future to enable the Constituency Boundaries Commission to compile its report along with its recommendation for tabling in Parliament, hopefully sometimes at the end of this year.

I also wish to reiterate what I said in my introductory statement that in terms of equitable and fair distribution of natural resource allocation, the disparity of population distribution that now exists amongst our current 50 constituencies mean that Members of Parliament with densely populated constituencies have less financial resources to work with compared to their colleagues in constituencies with a much smaller population size. I also mentioned in my introductory statement that of the four options considered by the Constituency Boundaries Commission, the option to fix the current 50 constituencies as the minimum and the maximum to 70 was the option recommended to be considered for amendment during its meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2009 hence this Constitutional Amendment Bill now before the house.

The Constituency Boundaries Commission had a consultation with me because the responsibility to amend the Constitution is vested in the Prime Minister, and it was the desire of the Constituency Boundaries Commission to

open up the limitations. And there was no discussion on what constituencies to be created.

Increasing the maximum number to 70 does not mean that come the 2010 national general elections we will have 70 seats to contest for parliament. This was well explained by all my Cabinet Ministers and backbenchers who have contributed to the debate. Section 54(4) of the Constitution says that Parliament may approve or reject any recommendation from the Constituency Boundaries Commission (CBC) as to the number of constituencies and boundaries but may not vary them. At this stage government is yet to receive any specific recommendations from the CBC as to the number of constituencies and boundaries. But by amending the Constitution through setting new minimum and maximum limits for the number of constituencies, we are preparing in advance for any recommendations that maybe forthcoming from the CBC, hopefully towards the end of this year in respect of the number and boundaries of constituencies throughout Solomon Islands.

If and when any recommendation comes from the CBC, Parliament as we have heard from other contributors still reserves the prerogative to either reject or approve any recommendation in respect of the number and boundaries of constituencies as rightly alluded to by the Deputy Prime Minister and my other colleagues on both sides of the House. When such recommendation comes before the Parliament towards the end of this year from the CBC, Parliament will then decide whether it is justifiable to increase the number of constituencies and boundaries or not. At that time those colleague Members of Parliament who raised concerns such as my good colleague MP for East Are Are and my good friend, the Leader of Independent Group, the comments they made will then become relevant and important considerations. Of course, they have raised very important considerations in relation to cost implications, the need for government to be prudent with spending in difficult economic times or whether or not the matter is a priority or is of urgent and importance and indeed whether or not Solomon Islands is already over governed. For now, what we are concerned about and should rightly focus on is the setting of new minimum and maximum limits on the number of constituencies, having reached the allowable number specified in Section 54(1) of our Constitution, and not increasing the number of constituencies to 70 seats by the 2010 national general elections, as some Members of Parliament would have us believe. I think the proponents of this argument need to be reminded that this Bill is not about having 70 constituencies by the 2010 elections. I want to make it clearly understood that this Bill is about setting new limits on the minimum and maximum number of constituencies. It is not about increasing the number of constituencies to 70 by 2010.

As rightly alluded to by the good Minister for Forest and Member of Parliament for North New Georgia, the lawful body to determine the number of constituencies and boundaries is the Constituency Boundaries Commission, and any such determination is subject to Parliament approval or rejection. All those colleagues who progress such arguments in their debates on the floor of this House are best advised to wait patiently for the time when Parliament will deliberate on the report and recommendation by the Constituency Boundaries Commission at a later stage on the actual number of constituency and boundaries. In the meantime, I urge those colleague MPs to think wisely and vote in support of the Bill.

Let me now move onto other issues raised by Members of Parliament who contributed in the debate. I do agree with most of the colleagues that the Bill is a simple one. And as I keep repeating this Bill is about increasing the minimum and maximum limits in the number of constituencies from 50 to 70. So I was expecting the debate to focus on this simple objective, but some of the colleagues had some very good points as well, except that for the time being they are irrelevant. Therefore, I would encourage all those colleagues who raised such broad points in their debate to make their submissions to the relevant authority, which is the Constituency Boundaries Commission or alternatively they should prepare to debate the report by the CBC which will come before Parliament later.

I would like to assure the House and the Member of Parliament for West New Georgia Vona Vona that the government would not interfere with the work of the Constituency Boundaries Commission. I do not think any right thinking person would want to play it that way. He knows too well that I am not the kind of person who is known for bulldozing any issues onto other colleagues without proper consultation and reaching a general consensus. I can assure the House that the work of the CBC would not be politically dictated. This assurance should be sufficient to address the concerns by the honorable Member of Parliament for West New Georgia and Vona Vona.

On the same token, I want to urge Parliament to trust the members of the Constituency Boundaries Commission, which comprised of experienced and ex-politicians, senior citizens and the Government Statistician. With preparations well underway for our national population census in November this year and by way of preparation a national household survey has already been undertaken and with a pilot population census soon to be undertaken, I am sure they will be well equipped with the necessary and correct data to make rationale and justifiable recommendations to Parliament. I am also sure that they will also have the accurate data and costing and with the benefit of having the records of Hansard in our debate on this issue and on this bill, I am sure that they will have

accurate data and costing to help Parliament debate and make the right decision on their recommendations at the appropriate time.

On the concern raised by the Constitutional Review Committee that it should have been the CBC that ought to recommend to Parliament in respect of setting the minimum and maximum limits and number of constituencies in Solomon Islands pursuant to Section 54(1), it is the Government's position based on sound legal advice that setting the minimum and maximum limits on the number of constituencies is the prerogative of Parliament.

The exercise we are embarking upon is what I would term as Parliament looking at the big picture first by setting the scene and creating the required space. Put it another way, if you want to invite people to come into a house that is already a full House, then obviously you have to create space to accommodate them. This is exactly what Parliament is being asked to do now. Following this, the next steps, which are the responsibilities of the CBC will become clearer and easier to facilitate. That is to recommend to Parliament the number of constituencies and boundaries having regard to the principle that the number of inhabitants of which constituency shall be as nearly as equal as is reasonably practicable, and taking into account the distribution of the population, the means of communication and ethnic affiliation as provided for under Section 54(4) of the constitution. Once again, such a determination will be subject to the approval of Parliament.

As to the concerns raised regarding the timing of bringing this constitutional amendment bill to Parliament and the assertion that it is not good and proper to make this kind of change in our Constitution at the end of the current parliament's term, I simply want to say that I think the timing is right and I think such a timing as this time has been the common practice. I am sure that colleagues who have been in parliament for much longer than some of us would agree that this kind of constitutional amendment bill is brought to the House around this time to allow ample time for responsible authorities to make the necessary arrangements to implement the decisions made by Parliament accordingly. There is absolutely no political motive behind this move. Rather the government is simply asking Parliament to do what it is mandated to do under Section 51(1) of the Constitution.

I would like to go on to cover some of the issues that are raised by the Honourable Leader of Opposition. First of all, he started off by making some comments on the quality of MP's in the House. His comments seem to imply that Parliament does not have quality MPs. He is later joined by the MP for South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare. I think this is a demeaning statement and a denial of voters' choice. As you know, in Melanesian politics, quality is what people value. It is the people who set the quality and criteria and vote MPs

on the basis of those qualities and criteria. And so Members of Parliament or all of us here who won the elections and come in and get chosen by our people are judged on the basis of what our people value, and not what somebody else values.

The Honorable Leader of Opposition also mentioned that right now there is a great divide or a great abyss between national and provincial governments, and that provincial governments are only agents. Of course, we know that this has existed since the introduction of provincial governments and this argument still remains alive and strong today, especially as we look at our federal constitution. I think over the last two months what the Constitutional Congress and the Eminent Persons Group are grappling with are issues to do with powers, concurrent powers that we give to the states. It should have taken them one month to settle this argument but it has taken them two months. I think at this stage there are some provinces that are ready to take on all the functions they would like to take and there are other smaller provinces that are not. I think that is where we are at and what we really need right now to try and put these altogether in some kind of a legal way into our Constitution is to have constitutional lawyer as well as perhaps a legal drafts person. The issue of that divide between the national and the provincial government is indeed a live and strong argument as we try to put together the draft federal constitution, and I am sure these issues will be sorted out with our legal people. The federal constitution is being worked out. As you know we have a program that is going on and that will come in its own time. I hope that we can be able to bring that Bill when it is ready.

When you look at what we have been talking about in the last three days, and I am sure you are sitting up there, Sir, listening to what is being said, I would like to say that the principle enshrined in the Constitution is clearly that of equal representation under Section 54(3), and that all the other considerations are held by the Constitution to be subsidiary to this. I think the question raised by the Member for Temotu/Nende on the principle intended by our founding fathers is that of equal representation. I think clearly that is the primary intention of our founding fathers.

In conclusion, the question for us today is whether we think our founding fathers have got it wrong so that things like cost and resources should become primary considerations and the principle of equal representation should be relegated to some subsidiary positions. As I have said earlier on, if that is the case then I think we should then go on and do what is required of us, and that is the government is simply asking Parliament to do what it is mandated to do under Section 54(1) of the Constitution. With these remarks, I thank you and I beg to move.

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members, before I put the question, I wish to remind Members that under Section 61(2)(c) of the Constitution, any amendment to Sections 46 to 58 inclusive of the Constitution may only be passed if supported on two separate readings by the votes of at least three quarter of majority of all Members of Parliament. Thus, this Bill must be supported by three quarter majority of all Members thereof at the second reading and again at the third reading. In this instance, three quarter majority of 49 Members is to 37, round up from a decimal point. Normally under Standing Order 41, a collection of voice is taken first before division may be called. However, because of the requirement for a specific majority and since it is unlikely that I will be able to determine whether or not this motion has the support of the kind of majority by a simple voice collection, we will go straight to a division to be administered by the Clerk in accordance with Standing Order 42.

Note that although we cannot physically lock our doors, consider them locked. Thus I would not allow any Member to enter after the bells have stopped ringing. We will ring the bill for 2 minutes.

*The Bill is rung calling for Members to*

Roll call vote was made and the results are as follows:

Ayes	-	43
Noes	-	0
Abstention	-	0
Absent	-	6
Total		49

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members the motion is supported by the vote as required of three quarters of all Members. The Bill is therefore stand committed to the Committee of the Whole House.

### Bills – Committee Stage

The Constitution (Amendment) No. 2) Bill 2009

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members the House will now resolve into the Committee of the Whole House to consider this Bill.

### Committee of the Whole House



**Mr Chairman:** Honorable Members, the House is now resolved into Committee of the Whole House to consider this Bill and the Bill before us now is for the consideration of the Committee of the Whole House of the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009. We will go through the Bill clause by clause.

*Clause 1 agreed to*

## Clause 2

**Mr. Oti:** Section 54(1) has the numbers 30 and 50 and this is the one that is to be amended. Based on recommendations, I think there were options put to the government by the Commission, may be for the AG to inform the committee what are the other options given by the Commission? I asked this question because of what has been raised as to why limit it. What is the significance of this? Why not just open it up without any limit so that the entire work of the Commission under Section 64 when it conducts a review every 10 years is basically based on the need to do it and not to be restricted as we have done, hence my earlier question why was it put at 38 to 50 at that point in time. Now we are putting it to the same figure again. I want to know from the AG in terms of the rationale for this 50 to 70 as opposed to just opening it up and it is really up to the Commission to make recommendations on it.

**AG:** When officers from the office of CBC came to chambers and point out the limitations and ask us what options do we have, so we get them options, this is just a options you may come up with your own options. The options given to them were 4 options. The first one was to fix the minimum number at 30 as it was or as it is now and leave it the recommendation of CBC to determine the maximum number that was the first options given to them. In other words do not touch the minimum number you just deal with the maximum number and give that liberty to CBC to decide on.

The Second option was really a straight forward option just to increase the maximum number so I suppose it almost like the first option. The third option was to give parliament the power to fix maximum number just by an ordinary act rather than to have it constitutionally stated and every time we want amend it we have bring an act to amend constitution. So it was an advice to give the parliament the power to decide just by an ordinary legislation. That option will require of course constitutional amendments to section 54 if it was accepted and that will give of course power to CBC to recommend on the maximum number to parliament. The fourth option was the one which is now stated in the bill before parliament. When we give the advice to the officers of the CBC we were just

applying the same range and that was still in constitution the same range from 30 to 50 you have 20 spaces or 20 possible seats or constituencies. So it is the same range that we use, so you just move it up. Same 20, between 20 and 50 you add on top of the 50, so which takes it up to 70.

So it was just simple numbering like that, and we left to CBC to decide and discuss what option is better for them or to come back to us and also to discuss with the Prime Minister on the best option taken. But their response they decide to adopt the option 4.

**Mr. Zama:** Thank you Chairman, it is just a question in law. Now what difference does it make or what difference does this not make if you leave that number at 30 or increase to 50, knowing that there is already in the ceiling. Because really it does not make any difference or make any sense to have the lower limit whether we leave it at 30 or we increase because it is obsolete so really what is it there for?

**AG:** Mr. Chairman the architects of the constitution will have their reason but I can see that I think the reason is that because the CBC is given power to alter boundaries and number if you do not set the minimum limit in exercise of their power they can go right below. So I think it is more prudent that whilst giving the power to CBC to alter number and boundaries they must be given a guideline as well. So that is why in my reading of the section 54 a minimum number was set.

**Hon. Tosika:** On the same note as colleague said we reach the ceiling and within in 20 or 30 years time we will also reach the ceiling, and there will come a constitutional amendment to increase 70 to go up to another number that we want. Why don't we leave it, when we arrive at the minimum number of 50 since we now reach the ceiling and we leave it open ended and allow only the CBC to bring its report and recommendation other than we lock it up here which will create another constitutional amendment in future? Why don't we just leave it at a minimum number of 50 then leave the report of CBC to come for us to consider whether we reject it or approve then additional constituency can added? That is just my view because we will face that in future; when we reach 70 we will face another constitutional amendment to increase the number.

**AG:** That is an important point for consideration for future perhaps. There are many options in other countries, they just put the maximum number and then they have to just allocate a lot between themselves. In other places there are no maximum numbers it is just open. So those are all options have to be

left to parliament and government to decide in future and perhaps to start talking about it now. I cannot really speak from the legal side of it but it was very much a policy matter.

*Clause 2 agreed*

**Mr Chairman:** Honorable members there being no consequential amendments required to the title and no preamble. 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 resume.

*Parliament resumes*

**Hon. Sikua:** Mr Speaker, I wish to report that the Constitution Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009 has passed through the Committee of the Whole House without amendment.

### Bills – Third Reading

The Constitution (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2009

**Hon. Sikua:** I move that the Constitution Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009 be now read a third time and do pass.

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members I will put the question. The question is that the Constitution Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009 be now read the third time and do pass.

Honorable Members, as you are aware, under Section 61(2) of the Constitution, no constitutional amendment of the nature contained in this Bill is valid unless it is supported by the votes of at least three quarter majority of all Members on two separate readings, at second reading and at this reading, the third reading. As with the second reading vote I will not do a voice collection but we will instead carry out the division so that we can be sure of the actual numbers supporting this bill. I will now call on the Clerk to ring the bell for two minutes before taking the division.

*Vote proceeds by calling the names of the members alphabetically by the Clerk.*

**Mr Speaker:** Result of the votes:

Ayes	-	43,
Noes	-	0
Abstention	-	0
Absent		- 6,
Total		49

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members the motion is supported by the vote of the required three quarter of all Members. The bill therefore has the support of the required majority under the Section 61 of the Constitution on two separate readings being the second and the third readings. Accordingly the Constitution Amendment No. 2 Bill 2009 has been duly passed by Parliament.

*The Bill is passed*

**Hon Sikua:** I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

*The House adjourned at 4.28 pm*