

Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu (Na Vualiku Project)



Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA)

INTERIM REPORT

Executive Summary for Public Disclosure

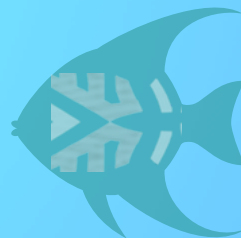


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1 Introduction

The Fiji Tourism Development Program for Vanua Levu (the Program), is a collaboration between the Government of the Republic of Fiji (GoF) and the World Bank (WB). The Phase I of the Program, known as the Na Vualiku Project (the Project), spans six years and focusses on addressing the fundamental barriers to tourism development in Vanua Levu and Taveuni. This includes understanding and addressing constraints related to transport infrastructure and essential services, planning, coordination and institutional arrangements, and enabling environment for private sector participation. Phase II will build on the analytical, planning, and pilot interventions established in Phase I by advancing the delivery of physical and social infrastructure investments identified through feasibility studies. Phase III will support the full implementation of investments, coordination mechanisms, and policy reforms identified through the Integrated Tourism Master Plan.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation (MTCA), which has oversight for Fiji's tourism sector, serves as the lead implementing agency (IA), supported by the Central Project Management Unit (CPMU). MTCA coordinates and implements the Project in collaboration with two other IAs (Fiji Roads Authority and Fiji Airports) as well as technical partners to deliver the Program.

The objective of the overall Program is to develop resilient and sustainable tourism infrastructure and services in Vanua Levu. This Phase 1 Project has the supporting objective to strengthen targeted infrastructure and essential services, increase coordination and private sector participation in tourism, and enhance environmental sustainability of tourism assets.

Na Vualiku will progress these objectives by focusing on activities that:

- strengthen targeted infrastructure and essential services;
- increase coordination and private sector participation in tourism; and
- enhance the environmental sustainability of tourism assets.

A foundational activity to achieve this is the development of an Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP). The ITMP aims to consolidate existing plans for development in the Northern Division to create a framework for sustainable tourism growth, destination management, and promotion in Vanua Levu and Taveuni over the next 25 years.

In support of this, an interim Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (the SESA) has been developed to inform the development of the ITMP; in turn, the outcomes of the ITMP will be integrated into a Final SESA, creating an adaptive planning process in which evidence and strategy continually reinforce one another.

This Executive Summary of the interim report provides an overview of the SESA process, findings and next steps.

1.1 Purpose of the SESA

The overarching purpose of the SESA is to systematically examine the impacts and risks associated with tourism expansion on Vanua Levu and Taveuni under a business as usual (BAU) trajectory. The SESA provides a structured, evidence-based platform for identifying the strategic environmental, social and cultural heritage priorities that must be addressed if tourism development in the Northern Division is to be sustainable, equitable and resilient.

Unlike project-level environmental and social impact assessments, which focus on the specific effects of individual investments, the SESA operates at a strategic level. It examines the cumulative pressures that tourism growth will place on ecosystems, communities, livelihoods, infrastructure and heritage and recommends the policy, governance, spatial planning and capacity-building measures that should be embedded within the ITMP to maximise benefits while managing harmful impacts.

Critically, the SESA treats environmental, social and cultural heritage factors as drivers of the development pattern, not only as a lens through which the impacts of a pre-determined pattern are assessed. Ecological sensitivity, hazard exposure, tenure, cultural significance and the threshold capacity of water, wastewater and solid waste systems should shape where, at what scale and in what sequence tourism development occurs. Several of these factors are hard constraints rather than considerations to be traded off.

The SESA does not prejudice the conclusions of the ITMP. Rather, it establishes the evidence base and the set of non-negotiable safeguard considerations that must shape how the ITMP is designed, implemented and monitored.

1.2 Methodology

Extensive engagement with stakeholders and communities across Vanua Levu and Taveuni, identified a series of key priority areas that people were most concerned about in relation to expanding tourism. Once those priority areas were identified, the SESA applied a systematic, phased impact assessment process consistent with international good practice. The assessment is framed against the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework, relevant Fiji legislation, and the World Bank and SPREP guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment. For each of the six priority issue areas identified, the assessment examined:

- the current baseline condition of the relevant environmental, social or cultural heritage system, including the legislative and regulatory framework governing it;
- the likely trajectory of that system under a BAU scenario, considering what happens if tourism development continues under existing policies, governance arrangements and investment patterns, without the strategic guidance of the ITMP; and
- the cumulative and compound risks that are likely to emerge as multiple pressures interact over time.

To ensure this was done in a structured way, the SESA applied the systematic assessment process shown in Figure 1 for each priority area.

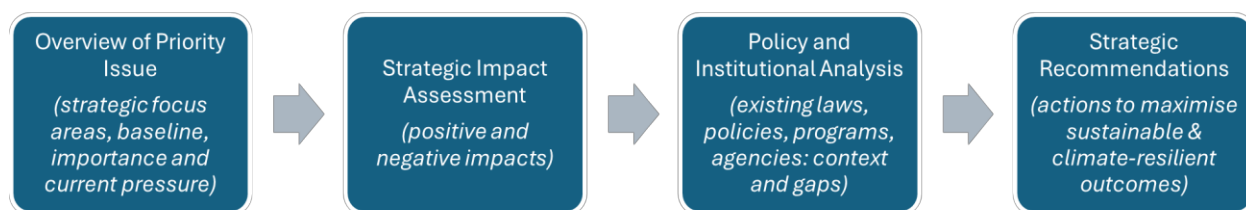


Figure 1: Strategic Assessment Process for Priority Area Impact Assessment

Within the Strategic Impact Assessment (Step 2 in Figure 1), an initial risk assessment was carried out and rated on a simple three-point scale within each priority area (Table 1).

Table 1: Initial Assessment Risk Scoring Definitions

Score	Rating	Definition
1	Low	Risks are limited in scale and scope, with little evidence of significant impacts under BAU. Risks are generally manageable through existing measures.
2	Moderate	Risks are evident, with localised or emerging impacts. Some mitigation is possible, but if unaddressed these risks may escalate.
3	High	Clear, widespread, or cumulative risks are already occurring or are highly likely under BAU. Impacts may be severe, systemic, or difficult to reverse.

This interim SESA represents the first stage of the overall assessment process. Once the draft ITMP is available, the SESA team will assess the extent to which its recommendations have been incorporated, update the analysis, and produce a Final SESA. The two documents are designed to be mutually reinforcing: the SESA informs the design of the ITMP, and the ITMP's strategic choices in turn reshape the initial environmental and social risks.

1.3 Stakeholder Consultations

The preparation of the interim SESA has been grounded in an extensive programme of community and stakeholder consultations (Table 2), carried out across two phases. The consultation process was designed to ensure that the SESA and subsequent recommendations to the ITMP reflects the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders including government agencies, provincial and district councils, mataqali and land-owning units (LOUs) civil society organisations, private sector operators, community groups and conservation specialists. It was further designed to ensure that findings are validated against on-the-ground realities before they are finalised.

Table 2: Summary of Consultations informing the Interim SESA

Activity	Summary
Inception Consultations	The first round of consultations was conducted in Suva in December 2024. These sessions engaged the Project Steering Committee, implementing

Suva, December 2024	agencies, civil society and non-governmental organisations, and private sector representatives. The purpose was to establish the analytical framework for the SESA, identify the key issues and priorities to be examined, and secure early stakeholder input into the scope of the assessment.
Extensive Community Engagement and Data Gathering Mission Vanua Levu and Taveuni, February 2025	An eleven-day field mission was undertaken in February 2025, covering Macuata, Bua, Cakaudrove, Taveuni and Suva. The mission involved meetings and consultations with the following categories of stakeholder: Provincial and local government • Macuata, Bua and Cakaudrove Provincial Councils • Commissioner Northern and the Northern Division Advisory Group • Town Councils of Labasa and Savusavu Central government ministries and agencies • Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Environment • Ministry of Agriculture • Additional sector ministries as relevant Private sector and investment bodies • Labasa Chamber of Commerce • Savusavu Chamber of Commerce • Investment Fiji • Individual tourism businesses and entrepreneurs across the region Civil society and non-governmental organisations • Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) • Transcend Oceania • Fiji Women's Crisis Centre — Labasa • Women's groups and youth representative organisations • BirdLife International • IUCN Oceania • Wildlife Conservation Society Community groups • Village Land Owning Units (LOU) across Macuata, Bua, Cakaudrove and Taveuni • Soqosoqo Vakamarama (Women's Committees) • Youth representatives
Validation Mission February 2026	A validation mission was conducted in February 2026, revisiting Macuata, Bua, Cakaudrove and Taveuni and meeting with many of the same stakeholders engaged during the 2025 data gathering mission. The purpose of this mission was to confirm that the findings presented in the interim SESA accurately reflected the evidence gathered in 2025, and to test the proposed recommendations with those most directly affected by the issues identified. Stakeholders were invited to review and augment the recommendations where they felt that additional or strengthened actions were warranted.

2 Situational Analysis and Key Constraints

The SESA assesses the current legislative, policy and institutional arrangements that shape environmental, social and cultural heritage management within Fiji's tourism sector, with particular

focus on the Northern Division. The analysis evaluates the administrative framework, the gaps within it, and the human and institutional capacity available to implement it.

LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK: Fiji has a broad policy and legislative base for environmental governance, which, in principle, offers a strong platform for well-managed tourism development and investment. In practice the framework is highly complex, spanning numerous Acts and strategies across multiple agencies, and this produces fragmented, inconsistent and often slow implementation. These structural dynamics directly influence how tourism development is planned, approved, and monitored, particularly in regions experiencing emerging or accelerated tourism growth, such as the Northern Division where institutional presence is thinner and enforcement capacity more constrained than in the main urban centres.

GAPS IN THE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK: The framework is not only difficult to implement; it is incomplete in a number of respects that are directly material to tourism development in the Northern Division. The SESA identifies the following gaps, each of which is picked up again in the relevant priority area below:

- The National Mangrove Management Plan has not been endorsed by Cabinet, leaving the primary instrument for protecting coastal green infrastructure without formal legal standing (Priority Area 3).
- Occupational health and safety legislation does not comprehensively cover marine and dive operations, which are central to the Northern Division's tourism offer (Priority Area 5).
- There is no legislation specifically safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including traditional sailing knowledge and customary fishing practices (Priority Area 6).
- There is no mandatory requirement for archaeological assessment ahead of development, and no systematic heritage survey of the Northern Division (Priority Area 6).
- There are no regulatory thresholds linking tourism development approvals to the available capacity of wastewater, faecal sludge and solid waste infrastructure (Priority Area 2).
- Water tariff structures are uniform and provide no pricing signal for conservation by high-consumption commercial users (Priority Area 2).

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY: The SESA identified capacity gaps across several themes directly relevant to the sustainable management of tourism development in the Northern Division:

- **Environmental regulation:** Limited staffing and technical capacity within the Department of Environment to conduct and review environmental impact assessments, monitor compliance or enforce conditions in a timely manner. EIA processes are slow, and post-approval monitoring is largely absent outside major infrastructure projects.
- **Land governance:** The iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) faces significant backlogs in lease processing and administration. The capacity of provincial offices to support communities in understanding and negotiating lease terms, or to access advisory services for structuring investment / equitable benefit sharing partnerships for tourism development and conservation, is limited.
- **Marine and fisheries governance:** Responsibility for coastal and marine resources is divided across the Ministry of Fisheries, iTaukei institutions holding customary fishing rights (qoliqoli), the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji and the Department of Environment. Monitoring and

enforcement presence in the Northern Division's inshore waters is minimal, and there is no coordinated mechanism linking customary marine management (including LMMAs) to tourism licensing or development approval.

- Cultural heritage protection: There is no dedicated archaeological or heritage protection agency with a field presence in the Northern Division. The identification, documentation and protection of cultural heritage sites is largely reactive, and significant gaps exist in baseline data.
- Coordination mechanisms: There is no formal multi-agency coordination platform for tourism planning and development in the Northern Division. Decisions on land use, natural resource management, infrastructure development, environmental permitting and tourism licensing occur across different agencies with limited communication between them.
- Infrastructure oversight: Municipal and district-level capacity to plan, procure and supervise infrastructure investments — particularly in water, wastewater, solid waste and energy — is limited. This reduces the effectiveness of public investment and creates risks of poor-quality infrastructure that is difficult to maintain.

Together, these legislative gaps and capacity constraints reduce the effectiveness of safeguards, slow development processes, and weaken the enabling environment for sustainable tourism growth in the Northern Division. Addressing them is a precondition for the ITMP achieving its objectives, and a number of the required actions fall outside the ITMP's own mandate. This is reflected in the structure of the recommendations in Section 4.

3 Key Issues and Priorities

Based on desk review and analysis, the field data mission and extensive inputs from stakeholders, six key priority areas have been identified as being of particular concern in relation to tourism development in the Northern Division. For each priority area, the key issues and concerns are described, the baseline situation is established, the relevant policy and regulatory gaps are identified, and an initial risk assessment score is assigned based on the three-point scale set out above. The risk assessment reflects conditions as of early 2025 verified in early 2026 under the business-as-usual scenario.

3.1 Priority Area 1: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR HIGH-VALUE TOURISM: The natural environment of the Northern Division (Figure 2), including the Somosomo Strait, Natewa Bay, Rainbow Reef and the Great Sea Reef, is a primary draw for high-value tourists and underpins the region's tourism value proposition. Biodiversity also supports the livelihoods, food security and cultural identity of iTaukei communities, making its conservation a matter of both economic and social significance. These ecosystems are under increasing pressure from multiple sources, and their continued health cannot be assumed in the absence of deliberate management.

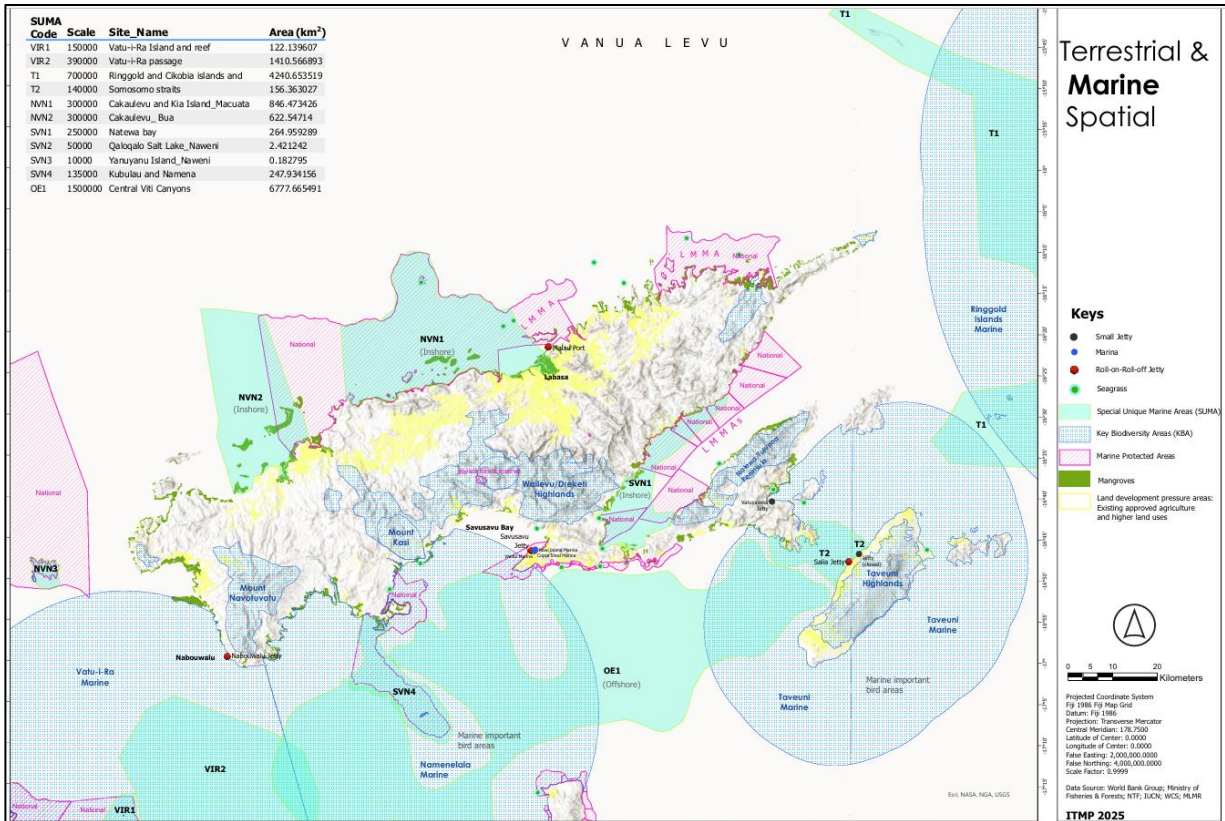


Figure 2: Terrestrial and Marine Conservation Features in Vanua Levu (KBAs, SUMA, Mangroves, Seagrass, Exposed Reef and Marine Protected Areas) and existing tourism infrastructure.

THREATS FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND INVASIVE SPECIES: Documented threats to biodiversity and ecosystem health include logging, deforestation, bauxite mining, quarrying, and damage to reef systems from yacht anchoring. Invasive species represent an additional and growing pressure. These impacts (Figure 3) are occurring alongside tourism development rather than in isolation from it, and their cumulative effect on the ecosystems that support the tourism sector is a material concern for the long-term position of the region as a world class nature-based tourism destination.

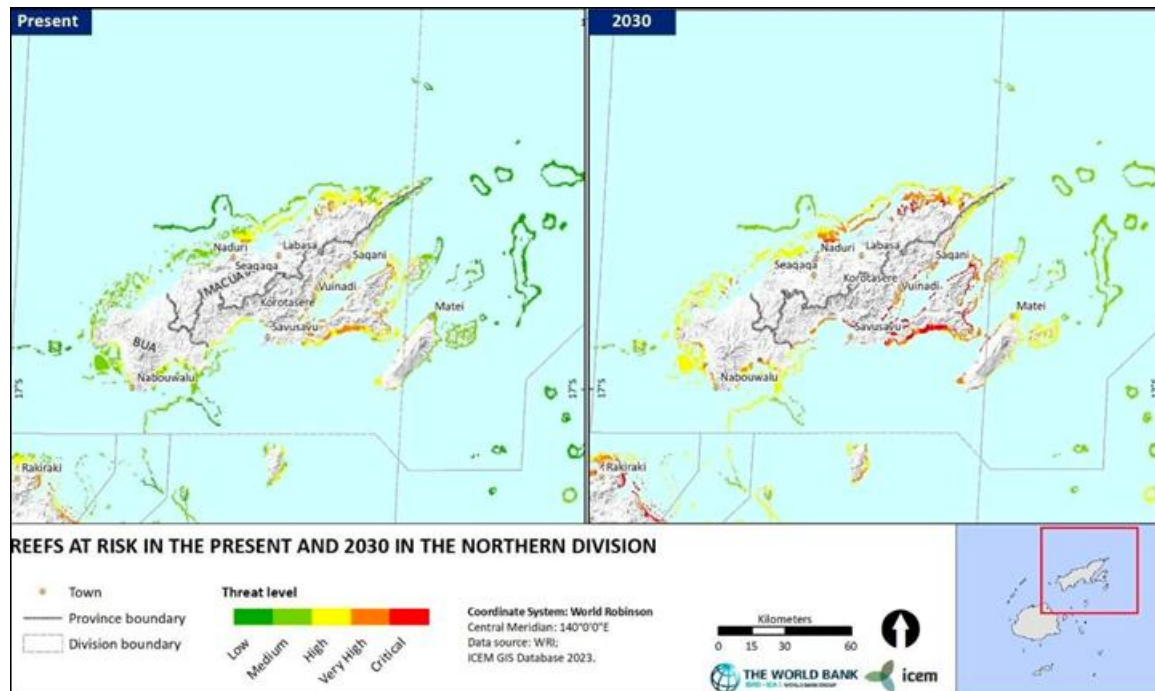


Figure 3: Reefs at Risk in the Present and 2030 in the Northern Division.

REGULATORY AND POLICY GAPS. There is no anchoring management regime for the high-use dive sites of the Somosomo Strait and Rainbow Reef, and no visitor capacity limits at any site in the Northern Division. Marine protected area coverage relies substantially on voluntary, community-declared LMMAs which have no statutory backing and cannot be enforced against third parties. The updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan is not linked to tourism licensing, so a tourism operator can be licensed without reference to the biodiversity values of the site.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PLANNING PROCESSES: Traditional ecological knowledge held by iTaukei communities is not currently being systematically incorporated into environmental planning and decision-making. Given the depth and specificity of community knowledge about local ecosystems, this represents both a missed opportunity and a direct risk, as planning conducted without this knowledge is more likely to overlook or undervalue environmentally and culturally significant sites, contributing to their loss.

LIMITED INCENTIVES FOR CONSERVATION THROUGH TOURISM: There are currently limited incentives within the tourism sector to reinforce or promote conservation. While isolated examples of conservation-linked tourism models exist in the region, these have not been systematically supported or replicated. Without deliberate mechanisms to align tourism investment with conservation outcomes, the growth of the sector is unlikely to generate the financing and stewardship behaviours needed to offset the pressures it places on the natural environment.

Governance constraints relevant to this priority area, including the fragmentation of responsibility for biodiversity and ecosystem management across agencies, and the limited monitoring and enforcement resource available to them, are set out in Section 2.

The above areas of concern group into: ecosystem condition and resilience, habitat loss and degradation, cultural ecosystem services and sustainable management. The associated risks and their initial ratings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation Risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation		
Ecosystem Condition and Resilience	Ecosystem health is declining under current pressures: • Unmanaged visitation in the Somosomo Strait • Increasing arrivals to Savusavu and Taveuni • Sedimentation from agriculture, forestry and mining is affecting the Great Sea Reef • Bacterial pollution in Savusavu Bay • Cyclone and landslide risks for Taveuni attractions • Unmanaged visitation pressures in Natewa Bay.	3 (High) Ecosystems already show signs of stress from existing pressures. Cumulative pressures likely to worsen under BAU expansion of tourism sector.
Habitat Loss and Degradation	Future infrastructure development poses major risks: • Expansion of roads, marinas, resorts, jetties, reclamation and dredging (particularly Savusavu Bay, Natewa Peninsula, Taveuni uplands) • Quarrying and earthworks near Labasa and Bua • Fragmentation of intact forests and mangroves. • Disproportionate impacts on range-restricted species (Natewa swallowtail butterfly, Fiji monkey-faced bat) or habitat-dependent species (turtle and seabird nesting sites).	3 (High) BAU expansion of tourism and associated infrastructure is likely to cause widespread habitat clearance and degradation, with significant direct, indirect and cumulative impacts.
Cultural Ecosystem Services	Ecosystems linked to cultural identity are vulnerable: • Environmental degradation of culturally significant sites in Savusavu • Pressures on tabu areas and totem species in Taveuni and Natewa. • Developers seeking to override fishing rights in Labasa • Limited systematic mapping of cultural-ecological values.	2 (Moderate) Custodianship traditions remain strong but increasing pressures threaten continuity. Risks to cultural identity will grow if ecosystems continue to degrade under BAU.
Sustainable Management	Management frameworks to promote or support conservation are weak and fragmented: • Isolated eco-tourism successes (Bouma, Lavena) • Absence of systematic conservation financing (eco-levies, offsets, leases) • Growing biosecurity risks (Giant American Iguana in Taveuni) • Limited replication of proven models (Namena diver levy, Vatu-i-Ra).	2 (Moderate) Some positive initiatives exist, but weak institutions and a lack of incentives mean sustainable management is unlikely to keep pace with pressures under BAU.

3.2 Priority Area 2: Resource Efficiency and Pollution Control

From the consultation, the following key issues and priorities related to resources efficiency and pollution control were identified as being critical to tourism in the Northern Division

INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY: The Northern Division's existing infrastructure for water supply, wastewater management, solid waste and energy is already operating under significant strain, with service gaps that reflect years of underinvestment and limited maintenance capacity. Tourism growth will add further pressure to systems that are poorly equipped to absorb it. Without investments in energy, waste and wastewater systems that are sequenced alongside — or ahead of — private sector tourism development, existing service gaps will widen, reinforcing the inequalities that already characterise access to essential services across the region.

SANITARY LANDFILLS AND CENTRAL SEWERAGE: The Northern Division lacks adequate sanitary landfill capacity and centralised sewerage systems. During heavy rainfall and flooding events, this results in the discharge of untreated effluent and waste leachate directly into coastal areas, with consequences for water quality, marine ecosystems and public health. This is not a risk of future tourism growth alone. It is a condition already present under current population and infrastructure settings that tourism expansion will compound.

AGEING SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND FAECAL SLUDGE MANAGEMENT: The widespread failure of ageing septic systems, combined with the absence of faecal sludge management facilities, is generating chronic pollution of coastal and inland waters across the Northern Division. Savusavu Bay is the most documented example, where bacterial contamination has resulted from systemic sewage infrastructure failure. There are no formal reception, treatment or disposal facilities for faecal sludge anywhere in the region, meaning there is no currently viable pathway for the safe management of waste generated by either the existing population or a growing tourism sector.

REGULATORY AND POLICY GAPS: There is no regulatory mechanism linking a tourism development approval to the residual capacity of the wastewater, faecal sludge or solid waste system that will receive its waste. Developments outside Water Authority of Fiji service zones are approved without any requirement to demonstrate a feasible desludging pathway, in a region where no desludging destination exists. Water tariffs are uniform across user classes, so a high-consumption resort faces the same unit price as a household and there is no pricing incentive for conservation. There are no tourism-specific standards for noise, light, waste, water, energy or generator emissions.

DIESEL DEPENDENCE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY: Energy supply across the Northern Division is heavily reliant on diesel generation, resulting in frequent outages, high operating costs and an energy profile that is inconsistent with Fiji's national renewable energy targets. Access to finance and technical support for renewable energy transitions remains limited, particularly for smaller operators and community-based enterprises.

WASTE DISPOSAL AND FLOODING IN LABASA: In Labasa, improper waste disposal is contributing to flooding by blocking drainage infrastructure. This illustrates a direct link between solid waste management failures and disaster risk — one that will be exacerbated by increasing waste volumes as tourism and urban populations grow, and that interacts with the climate change and disaster risk concerns.

INEQUALITIES REINFORCED BY SERVICE GAPS: Infrastructure deficiencies in energy, waste and wastewater do not affect all community members equally. Without targeted investment, tourism growth risks deepening existing inequalities by generating additional demand on already-strained systems. Low-income households, rural communities, women and persons with disabilities bear a disproportionate share of the consequences when essential services fail or become inaccessible.

WATER ACCESS AND RESOURCE CONSUMPTION: High water consumption rates in the hospitality and tourism sector, compounded by uniform tariff structures that provide no incentive for conservation, are exacerbating stress on water supply systems that are already capacity-constrained in parts of western Vanua Levu and Taveuni. This creates a risk that high consumption by hotels and resorts will crowd out community access to water, generating tension and deepening existing inequities. Women and girls, as primary managers of household water, carry a disproportionate burden when household water access is unreliable or insufficient.

UNSUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES: Unsustainable farming practices are identified in the SESA as a contributor to catchment degradation and coastal water quality deterioration, through runoff, sedimentation and chemical pollution of rivers and coastal environments. These pressures compound the direct impacts of tourism-related development on the same ecosystems and will need to be considered within any cumulative impact framework that the ITMP develops.

These areas of concern are grouped into: power generation, energy use, efficiency and emissions; solid waste management; sewerage and wastewater pollution and water resources. The associated key environmental, social and cultural heritage risks and their initial rating are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Resources efficiency and pollution control risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Resource Efficiency and Pollution Control		
Power generation, energy use, efficiency and emissions	- Under BAU, rising demand in Savusavu, Labasa and Taveuni will continue to drive outages and reliance on diesel. - Limited access to finance and technical support will constrain renewable uptake, widening cost and resilience gaps for smaller and community-based operators. - This will reduce service reliability, raise operating costs, and disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, while also creating knock-on risks for water supply, wastewater systems, healthcare and other refrigerator-dependent services.	3 (High) Clear, widespread, and cumulative risks associated with worsening energy constraints are highly likely under a BAU scenario.
Solid waste management and contamination	- Rising per capita waste generation (14.9% increase) is overwhelming existing, poorly managed landfills in Namara and Savusavu, leading to contamination of wetlands, mangroves and coastal areas. - Informal waste workers, many of them women and children, face unsafe conditions and direct exposure to toxins. - Poor waste services in peri-urban and rural settlements disproportionately affect low-income households, while pollution of mangroves and coastal environments	3 (High) Severe and systemic risks are likely under BAU, with contamination of coastal and terrestrial ecosystems and disproportionate impacts on low-income households and informal waste workers.

	undermines traditional fishing and cultural heritage practices.	
Sewage and wastewater pollution	- Widespread failure of old septic systems during rain events and lack of faecal sludge management facilities are resulting in chronic bacterial pollution in areas such as Savusavu Bay and severe public health risks. - Women and girls face heightened health and safety risks, including barriers to menstrual hygiene management, while persons with disabilities encounter significant obstacles to safe and dignified sanitation access. - Contamination also reduces fish stocks, undermining artisanal livelihoods for women and youth.	3 (High) High and escalating risks are expected under BAU due to chronic contamination, public health threats, and widening inequities in access to safe sanitation.
Water Resources	- High consumption rates in the hospitality and tourism sector, compounded by uniform tariff structures, exacerbate stress on already capacity constrained systems in western Vanua Levu and Taveuni, including rain shadow areas. - Water scarcity disproportionately impacts women and girls responsible for household water management, increases unpaid care burdens, and contributes to school absenteeism among adolescent girls and female teachers. - Persons with disabilities face barriers when water collection requires long travel or unsafe infrastructure, while high consumption by hotels can crowd out community access, creating tensions and inequities.	3 (High) Significant and widespread risks will persist under BAU as demand outpaces supply, deepening inequities and undermining resilience in climate vulnerable communities.

3.3 Priority Area 3: Climate Change and Disaster Risk

From the consultation, the following key issues and priorities related to climate change and disaster risk were identified as being critical to tourism in the Northern Division

OVERARCHING CONCERN - VIABILITY OF TOURISM IN THE NORTHERN DIVISION UNDER INCREASING CLIMATE

HAZARDS: The viability of the tourism sector in the Northern Division is directly affected by the increasing intensity of cyclones and other extreme weather events. Tourism assets, accommodation, transport links and natural attractions are all vulnerable to direct physical damage, with implications for operational continuity, investor confidence and the long-term attractiveness of the region as a destination. This is not a single risk but the cumulative product of a set of interacting factors, each of which is addressed below. Taken together, they mean that the sector's exposure is increasing at the same time as its natural and institutional defences are weakening.

The following factors contribute to this overarching concern:

LOSS OF MANGROVE FORESTS AND COASTAL GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: Mangrove forests in Macuata and Cakaudrove, which serve as critical natural buffers against storm surge, coastal inundation and erosion, are being removed. The loss of this green infrastructure reduces the natural protection available to coastal communities, tourism assets and agricultural land, and increases their direct exposure to climate-related hazards. The National Mangrove Management Plan, which is the primary instrument through which this could be controlled, has not been endorsed by Cabinet and therefore has no legal

force. Mangrove clearance is consequently proceeding without an effective regulatory constraint, which materially exacerbates the climate risk described above.

IMPACTS ON STAFF, INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUILDINGS: Extreme weather events affect physical tourism infrastructure and buildings, and they affect people. Both visitors and staff are exposed, and the safety of visitors is a particular concern given that many will be unfamiliar with cyclone protocols, will be accommodated in coastal properties and will be dependent on operators for evacuation and shelter. This creates operational and duty-of-care risks for tourism businesses during and after events, compounding the economic disruption caused by damage to assets and the interruption of services.

CONCENTRATION OF TOURISM ASSETS IN COASTAL ZONES: Tourism assets in the Northern Division are geographically concentrated in coastal zones that are directly susceptible to cyclones, storm surges and flooding (Figure 4). This spatial concentration means that a single significant event has the potential to affect a large proportion of the region's tourism infrastructure simultaneously, amplifying the economic and operational consequences of any individual hazard. The risk is compounded by the character of the existing building stock. Much of it is not built to climate-resilient standards, and a proportion has been constructed without development approval and outside any effective town planning framework. Where development is both concentrated in the hazard zone and not built to withstand the hazard, the exposure is multiplicative rather than additive.

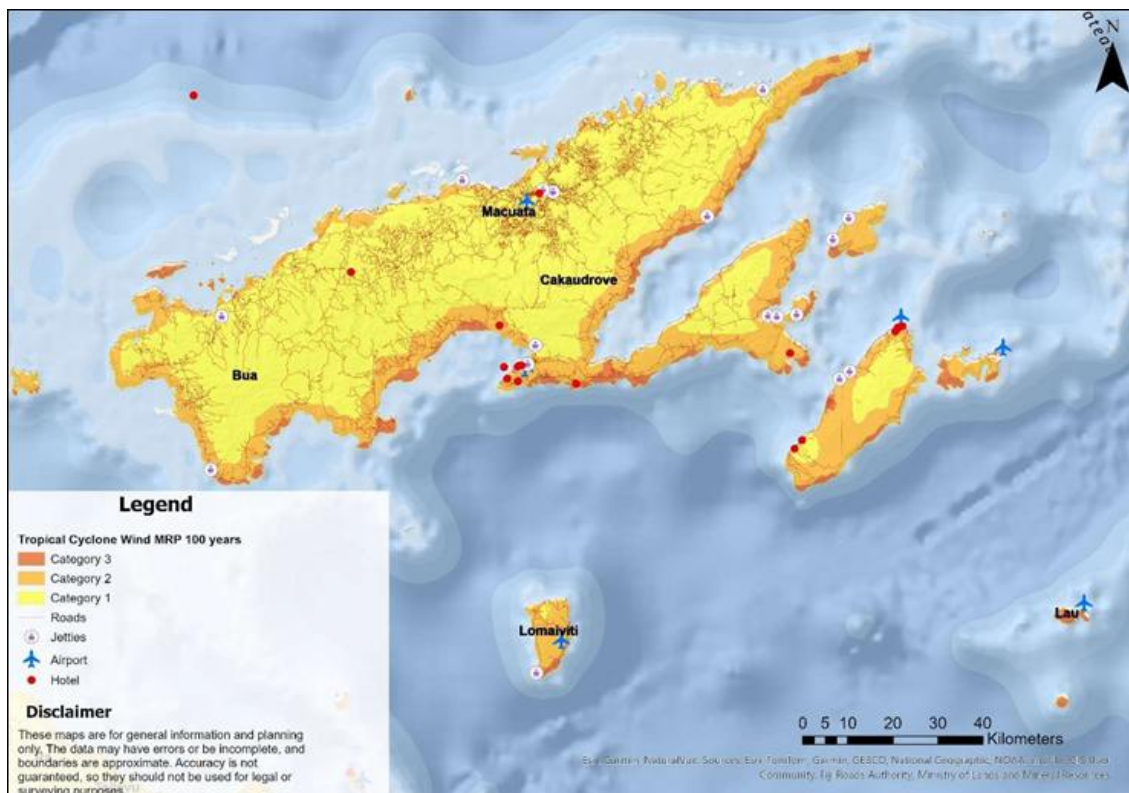


Figure 4: Tourism infrastructure and cyclone flood risk across the Northern Division

LIMITED INSURANCE UPTAKE AND WEAK BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING: A significant proportion of tourism operators in the Northern Division, particularly small, community-based and informal operators, hold no

insurance or are substantially underinsured, and few hold business continuity plans. This materially reduces the resilience of the sector as a whole. Where an operator has no financial buffer and no insurance, an extreme event that would be a recoverable loss for a larger operator becomes a business failure, with consequences for employment and for the continuity of the destination's tourism offer. Insurance penetration is therefore not a peripheral commercial matter but a determinant of how quickly the sector can recover.

LABASA AND RIVERINE FLOODING: Labasa is situated on a floodplain and faces frequent riverine flooding that causes property damage and disrupts both business operations and agricultural livelihoods. This recurring hazard represents a persistent constraint on the economic resilience of the town and the communities that depend on it, and is a material consideration for any tourism investment or infrastructure development in the Labasa area.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT COORDINATION: The National Disaster Management Office cluster system is documented and functional in the post-event response context. However, as noted in the SESA, coordination with private sector tourism operators remains weak, and the system does not currently extend to providing a unified coordination mechanism for the tourism sector in the Northern Division.

After grouping these into: coastal resilience and ecosystem buffers; risks to critical infrastructure and assets; disaster management coordination and business recovery, the key environmental, social and cultural heritage risks are assessed and the initial ratings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Climate change and disaster risk risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Climate Change and Disaster Risk		
Coastal resilience and ecosystem buffers	Under BAU, coastal ecosystem degradation due to climate change impacts will continue, lowering their value as a protective asset and reducing the natural capital on which the tourism sector in the Northern Division depends.	3 (High) Clear, widespread, and cumulative risks associated with worsening climate impacts are highly likely under a BAU scenario.
Risks to critical infrastructure and tourism assets	- Under BAU, critical assets and infrastructure (roads, energy, communication), are increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts. - The absence of a coordinated plan leads to continued ad-hoc development driven by proximity to services and land tenure security, putting pressure on existing services and increasing their vulnerability to climate change and disaster risk management.	3 (High) Severe and systemic risks are likely under BAU, with climate change and disaster risks impacting roads, trails and community partners.
Disaster management coordination	- Under BAU, the policy and institutional arrangements for disaster risk management are clear but do not include all voices and are Suva-centric. - A lack of a unified coordination group among tourism operators leads to fragmented response and a lack of a single entry point to collaborate.	2 (Moderate) Risks of fragmented response and recovery efforts are moderate, Disaster response is coordinated at the government and civil society level through the cluster

		system, but the coordination with private sector actors remains weak, leading to fragmented efforts.
Business recovery	Under BAU, small and medium businesses struggle to accumulate a financial buffer for use following an extreme event. Insurance uptake is low and few businesses have business continuity plans . Extreme events can therefore cause otherwise viable businesses to fail, and the absence of insurance across a large share of the sector slows the recovery of the destination as a whole.	2 (Moderate) Risks to businesses from climate and disaster risks are moderate, with larger businesses able to withstand larger shocks due to effective continuity plans and insurance. Smaller and medium businesses, including community based operators, are unlikely to have effective response and recovery plans.

3.4 Priority Area 4: Land Governance, Tenure and Community Partnerships

Priority issues and concerns have been grouped into thematic areas relevant to the ITMP, which form the basis of the assessment and subsequent recommendations.

iTAUKEI LAND TENURE, FREEHOLD LAND AND THE PATTERN OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: Approximately 86 percent of land in the Northern Division is inalienable iTaukei land (Figure 5). However, tourism development to date has clustered on the comparatively small freehold estate, principally in and around Savusavu and on Taveuni. Freehold land is faster to acquire, offers investors more secure tenure and does not require the extended negotiation and consent processes that leasing customary land entails. The consequence is significant: the pattern of tourism investment has largely bypassed land and resource owners, who hold the great majority of the land but capture a small share of the sector's returns. Tourism has developed around the customary estate rather than with it.

Negotiation of leases over iTaukei land is complex and frequently protracted, and the legacy of past transactions, including arrangements entered into without adequate community understanding or consultation, remains a source of friction in a number of areas across the region.

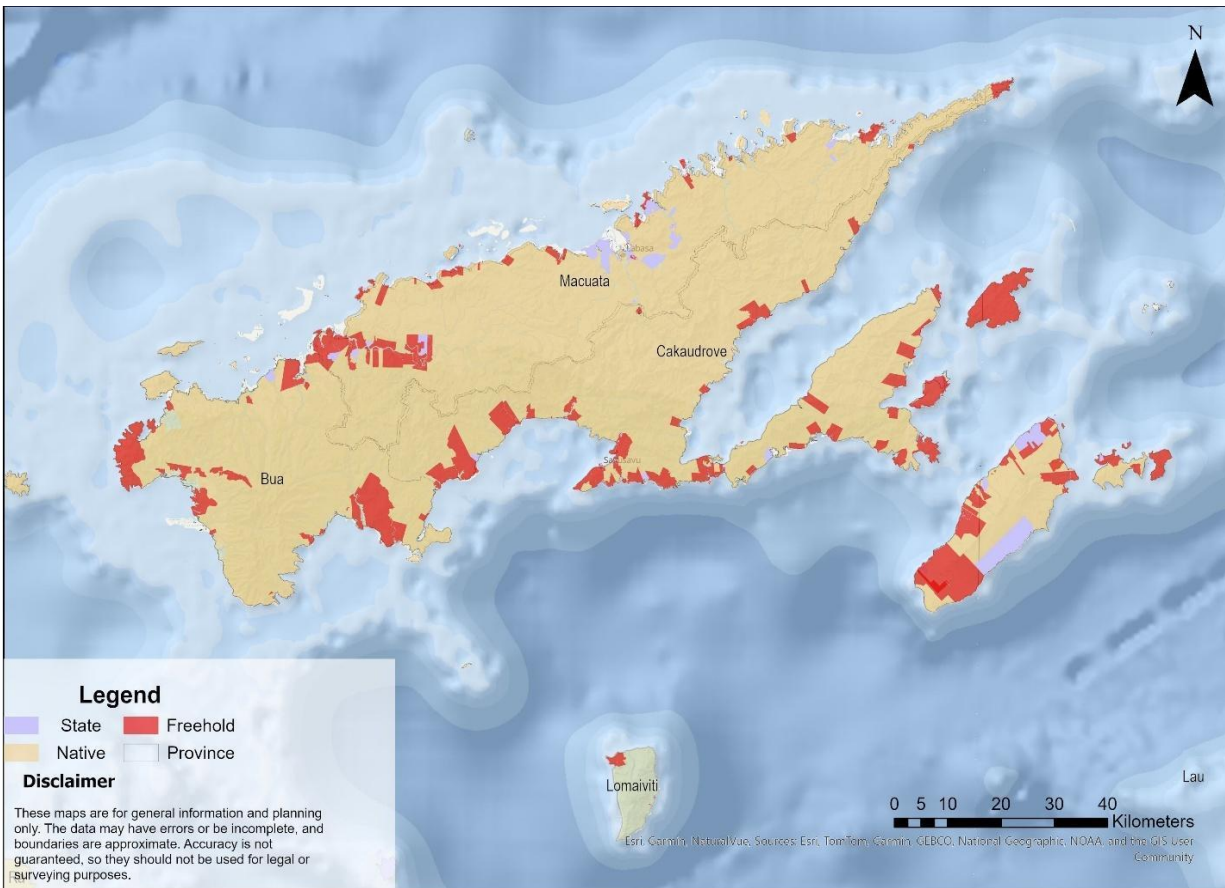


Figure 5: Land Tenure of the Northern Division

REGULATORY AND POLICY GAPS. Land management, lease administration, empowerment of iTaukei landowners and benefit oversight responsibilities are fragmented across TLTB, iTAB, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Ministry of Lands and provincial offices. There is no standard framework or guidance for equitable benefit sharing in tourism partnerships on iTaukei land, and no established set of investment structures (joint venture, equity, profit share, revenue share) that landowning units and investors can work from. Recent and pending legislative developments, including the iTaukei Land Trust (Amendment) Act 2023, bear directly on the pathways available for tourism leasing and should be assessed by the ITMP.

TOURISM EXPANSION, COMMUNITY CONFLICT AND INEQUITABLE BENEFIT DISTRIBUTION: The complexity of land acquisition processes means that tourism expansion carries a material risk of exacerbating existing community conflicts or generating new ones. As demand for land increases alongside tourism growth, disputes over boundaries, lease terms, benefit entitlements and decision-making authority within and between mataqali are likely to intensify. This risk is amplified by a widespread perception among communities across the Northern Division that existing tourism partnerships are inequitable and that the distribution of benefits does not adequately reflect the value of the land and resources being made available. This perception, whether or not it is fully borne out in every individual case, is itself a

significant risk factor, as it shapes community attitudes toward tourism investment and creates conditions in which mistrust can persist and deepen regardless of the intentions of individual investors or agencies.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INVESTMENT STRUCTURES: Relevant government agencies lack the institutional capacity and inter-agency coordination mechanisms needed to support communities and investors in navigating land-related investment decisions effectively. This fragmentation contributes to the inconsistent application of processes, creates opportunities for miscommunication and dispute, and makes it difficult for communities to identify a clear and reliable point of engagement with the system. A specific gap exists in knowledge of the investment structures (joint ventures, profit-sharing arrangements, equity models) that would enable communities to participate in tourism development on terms that are genuinely informed and equitable. Without this capacity, communities are poorly positioned to assess the implications of proposed arrangements or to negotiate effectively on their own behalf.

INDO-FIJIAN LAND ACCESS AND TENURE INSECURITY: Macuata and Bua have substantial Indo-Fijian populations whose agricultural livelihoods have historically depended on leases over iTaukei land, particularly in the sugar cane belt around Labasa. The non-renewal and expiry of agricultural leases can create displacement of households and creates tenure insecurity. As tourism expands and land values rise, competition for the same land intensifies, and Indo-Fijian leaseholders and informal occupiers are among those most exposed to displacement without a clear entitlement to compensation or to a share of the resulting benefits.

SOCIAL LICENCE FOR TOURISM EXPANSION: Land governance, tenure security and the equitable distribution of benefits are directly linked to the social licence for tourism expansion in the Northern Division. Where communities do not trust the processes by which their land is accessed or do not see a fair return from tourism activity on their land, that social licence is fragile. The SESA identifies this as a foundational risk: without meaningful progress on land governance and benefit sharing, the conditions for sustainable and broadly supported tourism growth will not be in place.

After grouping these into: land tenure security and lease administration; livelihoods displacement; equitable benefit sharing and community readiness; and cultural heritage and indigenous custodianship, the key environmental, social and cultural heritage risks and their initial rating are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Land governance, tenure, community partnerships risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Land Governance, Tenure and Community Partnerships		
Land Tenure Security and Lease Administration	Land tenure will continue to underpin tourism expansion: Savusavu continues to grow and expand as a hub for yachts. The town continues to attract high-value guests for exclusive resorts and yachties.	3 (High) Land use remains key to tourism and supporting infrastructure

	- Leasing of iTaukei land is a critical route to expanding tourism development across the great majority of the Northern Division's land area, but under BAU it will continue to be bypassed in favour of the more straightforward processes for leasing freehold land where that is available which will hinder tourism growth. - Expiry and non-renewal of agricultural leases continues to generate tenure insecurity and displacement risk for Indo-Fijian leaseholders, particularly in the Labasa cane belt, and unresolved land legacy issues will be compounded as tourism raises land values. - Land legacy issues will continue to influence the type and location of future tourism investments, and heighten the risks of community disputes as tourism grows.	development. Weak administrative capacity delays development processes and restricts innovative partnerships that support inclusive tourism development, heightening the risks that tourism growth exacerbates inequalities and community disputes.
Equitable Benefit Sharing and Community Readiness	The benefits from tourism are likely to continue to be constrained to those that can self-finance investments, generating perceived and actual risks that tourism growth generates inequitable benefits. - Tourism expansion will continue to occur mainly where there is access to freehold land (around Savusavu and on Taveuni) and tourism development opportunities for resource owners will remain limited - Transparency relating to land valuation, lease values and profits earned by tourism businesses remains low, reinforcing mistrust within value chains. - Advisory services to support the structuring of investments (e.g. joint ventures, partnerships, equity and profit sharing models) to maximise inclusion remain underdeveloped - Community-led ventures are likely to continue to struggle to overcome barriers to entry, including access to finance on communal land, and successful examples remain isolated (Muanivatu Trails, Bouma, Lavena).	3 (High) Land tenure security will continue to dominate investment decisions. A lack of transparency relating to tourism values fuels ongoing mistrust. Tourism expansion will reinforce existing ownership structures and limit opportunities for resource owners under BAU.
Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Custodianship	Cultural stewardship of land is strong on Vanua Levu and Taveuni, and traditional ways of life remain. As tourism expands, cultural stewardship may weaken, affecting cultural identity and the customary management arrangements that underpin it.	2 (Moderate) Cultural ties to land weaken as tourism expansion gradually erodes traditional custodianship principles.

3.5 Priority Area 5: Labour, Livelihoods and Social Inclusion

From the consultation, the following key issues and priorities related to labour, livelihoods, social inclusion were identified as being critical to tourism in the Northern Division.

TRANSITION TO FORMAL EMPLOYMENT: Tourism growth in the Northern Division will accelerate a shift from subsistence and traditional livelihoods, principally agriculture and fishing, toward waged employment in the tourism sector. This transition brings real benefits, including cash income, formal employment

protections and career pathways that do not currently exist for many households. It also carries risks. Households that move out of subsistence production become exposed to the seasonality and volatility of tourism demand, lose a degree of food self-sufficiency, and may find that the skills and knowledge underpinning traditional livelihoods are not transmitted to the next generation.

UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS, SEAH AND SAFEGUARDING: Unsafe working conditions are documented across tourism enterprises in the Northern Division, particularly in small and informal operations. Workers face limited access to protective equipment and inconsistent adherence to occupational health and safety standards. Risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) are heightened by verbal hiring arrangements, incomplete written employment agreements and grievance mechanisms that are poorly understood or perceived as inaccessible. Safeguarding risks are a material concern across the sector and require systematic rather than ad hoc responses.

MARINE SAFETY, VESSEL SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Marine safety is an identified concern across tourism operations in the Northern Division and it has three distinct aspects:

Vessel and equipment safety: Boat operations serving tourism are frequently unregulated. Vessels are poorly maintained, safety equipment including lifejackets, emergency beacons (EPIRBs), radios and flares is often absent or non-functional, and drivers may be unlicensed or inexperienced. These conditions apply to inter-island transfers and to marine excursions and dive trips, and they expose both workers and visitors.

Emergency medical infrastructure: Despite the region's significance as a dive destination, there is no hyperbaric chamber in the Northern Division. This represents a serious gap in emergency medical infrastructure for an activity that carries inherent decompression risk, with implications for the safety of both visitors and the workers who guide and support diving operations.

Regulatory framework: Occupational health and safety legislation does not comprehensively cover marine and dive operations, and there is no tourism-specific marine safety standard. Enforcement presence in the Northern Division's inshore waters is minimal. The combination of unsafe equipment, no local recompression capability and no effective regulatory floor means the residual risk to divers, passengers and marine tourism workers is high.

SKILLS SHORTAGES AND LABOUR MOBILITY OUT-MIGRATION: The Northern Division is experiencing a skills crisis driven by the combined effect of limited local training availability and significant out-migration through overseas labour mobility schemes. The departure of experienced workers through programmes such as PALM and RSE is creating persistent labour shortages that affect service quality and business continuity across the tourism sector. Training infrastructure outside Labasa and Savusavu is limited, and high transport costs constrain access even where training is nominally available.

WOMEN'S WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION AND UNPAID CARE: Women in the Northern Division's tourism workforce are disproportionately concentrated in lower-wage roles, while simultaneously carrying heavy unpaid care burdens at home. This double burden limits women's ability to access training, pursue career advancement or establish and grow enterprises, and means that the economic benefits of tourism employment are distributed unequally across gender lines.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER PATHWAYS: Young people in the Northern Division report persistent difficulties in accessing decent, stable long-term employment in the tourism sector. Tourism jobs

available to youth are frequently short-term, informal or poorly defined, and career pathways into more skilled or supervisory roles are unclear. This limits the extent to which tourism growth translates into meaningful economic opportunity for one of the region's largest demographic groups.

INCLUSION ACROSS COMMUNITIES: Access to tourism employment, enterprise opportunity and supply chain participation is not evenly available across the Northern Division's communities. iTaukei communities hold the land and the cultural assets on which much of the region's tourism proposition rests, but as set out in Priority Area 4 they capture a limited share of the returns. Indo-Fijian communities, concentrated in and around Labasa and in the agricultural sector, are geographically and economically distant from the coastal tourism hubs and are poorly represented in tourism consultation and planning processes. Neither group is well served by the current pattern of development, and the barriers each faces are different: for iTaukei communities the binding constraint is the ability to convert land and cultural assets into an equitable stake in the sector; for Indo-Fijian communities it is access to the sector at all, whether as workers, suppliers or operators.

MSMEs, ACCESS TO FINANCE AND COMPLIANCE BARRIERS: Micro, small and medium enterprises face significant structural barriers to participating in and supplying the tourism sector. Access to finance on communal land remains limited, and the compliance environment — spanning licensing, regulatory requirements and administrative processes — is complex and difficult to navigate without dedicated support. These barriers restrict the ability of locally owned enterprises to grow, formalise and integrate into tourism supply chains, limiting the degree to which tourism expenditure circulates within the local economy.

These areas of concern are grouped by sub-theme and their key environmental, social and cultural heritage risks along with their initial rating are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Labour, livelihoods, social inclusion risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Labour, Livelihoods and Social Inclusion		
Employment, Skills and Workforce Participation	- Under BAU, limited access to accredited training outside Labasa and Savusavu, combined with high transport costs, caregiving responsibilities and uneven course availability, will continue to restrict participation for rural communities, women and youth. - Labour mobility schemes and out-migration will intensify local skill shortages, leaving operators unable to fill key roles and increasing unpaid care burdens for women who remain behind. - Most tourism jobs will remain short-term, seasonal or low-wage, offering few pathways into stable careers. - MSMEs—especially women-led enterprises—will continue to face finance, licensing and compliance barriers, widening disparities between larger operators and community-based enterprises.	3 (High) Persistent and systemic workforce constraints are highly likely under BAU, with significant implications for equity, service quality and tourism competitiveness.

Livelihoods displacement	Tourism development may displace agricultural and fishing livelihoods: As tourism expands, subsistence and traditional livelihoods may be progressively displaced by paid employment in the tourism sector.	2 (Moderate) BAU expansion of tourism and associated infrastructure is likely to cause changes to livelihoods with significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts.
Community Health and Wellbeing	- Rising NCD prevalence, limited access to specialised health services and climate-related shocks will continue to strain already overstretched health facilities in Labasa, Savusavu and Taveuni, reducing workforce resilience and household stability. - As tourism grows, demand for emergency care, trauma response, infectious disease management and routine services will increase, placing additional pressure on systems that already face staffing shortages, equipment gaps and uneven service coverage. - Women and youth face barriers to safe transport, childcare and public spaces, limiting their ability to access training or employment and increasing exposure to harassment and unsafe environments. - Community leaders report rising exposure of youth to drugs, pornography and child protection risks linked to tourism growth and economic stress, undermining wellbeing and social cohesion. - These pressures are likely to compound labour shortages, reduce service reliability and heighten inequities in access to essential care, particularly for rural communities, older people and persons with disabilities.	3 (High) Significant and widespread risks will persist under BAU, with compounding effects on community wellbeing, labour supply, health system capacity and social cohesion.
Occupational Health, Safety and Worker Protection	- Workers—particularly in small and informal tourism enterprises—face long hours, limited protective equipment and inconsistent adherence to OHS standards, including in marine and transport operations. - Unregulated boat operations, unlicensed or inexperienced drivers, poorly maintained vessels and absent or non-functional safety equipment create significant safety risks for both workers and visitors. The absence of a hyperbaric chamber in the Northern Division means that decompression incidents require evacuation to Suva, and OHS legislation does not comprehensively cover marine and dive operations - Women reported harassment from supervisors, colleagues and customers, with SEA/SH risks heightened by verbal hiring arrangements, incomplete written agreements and grievance pathways that are poorly understood or mistrusted. - Persons with disabilities face inaccessible workplaces and unsafe infrastructure, while youth often enter	3 (High) High and escalating risks are expected under BAU due to unsafe conditions, unregulated maritime operations, SEA/SH exposure and weak worker protections.

	informal or unregulated roles with no induction or protections. Weak enforcement capacity and limited inspections will perpetuate unsafe conditions, increase accident and harassment risks, and erode trust in tourism workplaces.	
Social Protection, Safeguarding and Community Support Systems	- Social protection and safeguarding systems will face rising demand as tourism expands, yet coverage remains uneven and access to formal services is limited in rural and maritime communities. - Weak reporting pathways, limited survivor-centred services, and inconsistent operator-level safeguarding practices heighten risks of SEA/SH, child exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence, particularly for women, youth and children. - Community-based organisations and faith groups are already filling critical gaps in counselling, referrals and crisis support, but these systems are fragile, under-resourced and highly vulnerable to climate shocks and funding constraints. - Limited coordination across agencies and unclear referral pathways further increases the likelihood that serious harms go unreported or unaddressed.	3 (High) Severe and cumulative safeguarding risks are highly likely under BAU, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups.
Inclusion, Participation and Access to Opportunities	- Tourism benefits remain unevenly distributed, with rural communities, women, youth, persons with disabilities and older people frequently excluded from planning processes and value chains such as transport, handicrafts, food supply and guiding. - Consultations are often inaccessible due to timing, location, transport costs and lack of disability-inclusive venues, reinforcing barriers to participation. - Farmers and fishers report reduced access to land, coastal areas and natural resources as tourism expands, increasing competition for water, fuel and transport and weakening traditional livelihoods. - Women's groups and youth representatives expressed frustration at being engaged late or not at all in decision-making, undermining trust, transparency and community ownership of tourism development.	3 (High) Clear and systemic inequities are likely to deepen under BAU, limiting broad-based participation and weakening community support for tourism.

3.6 Priority Area 6: Cultural and Natural Heritage

From the consultation, the following key issues and priorities related to cultural and natural heritage were identified as being critical to tourism in the Northern Division.

TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: SACRED SITES, ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES AND PHYSICAL HERITAGE: Poorly planned development poses a direct risk to the physical cultural heritage of the Northern Division. This includes sacred sites and tabu areas, and archaeological features including house mounds, fortifications and

burial sites. Sacred sites are vulnerable both to inappropriate visitor access and to development activity that does not adequately account for their significance.

The regulatory gap here is clear. There is no mandatory requirement for archaeological assessment ahead of development, no systematic heritage survey of the Northern Division against which a proposed development could be screened, and no heritage agency with a field presence in the region. Professional archaeological expertise is scarce. The practical consequence is that development activity can damage or destroy heritage features before they are ever formally recorded, and there is no mechanism by which this would be detected, let alone prevented. Under BAU, heritage loss in the Northern Division is likely to be both ongoing and undocumented.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: Tourism expansion carries a risk of gradual erosion and dilution of iTaukei culture, traditional practices and values. As the pace of development increases and communities are drawn more fully into the tourism economy, the transmission of cultural knowledge and the maintenance of customary ways of life face growing pressure. This concern was raised consistently across consultations and reflects a broadly held view that the cultural integrity of communities must be an explicit consideration in tourism planning, rather than an assumed casualty of economic growth.

Stakeholders expressed concern about the commodification of culture, that is the packaging and presentation of cultural practices and sites for tourist consumption in ways that may not reflect community values or wishes. Sacred sites are particularly vulnerable, both to inappropriate visitor access and to development activity that does not adequately account for their significance. These concerns point to the need for community-controlled processes that determine how, and to what extent, cultural heritage is incorporated into tourism products.

The regulatory gap is that no legislation in Fiji specifically safeguards intangible cultural heritage, including traditional sailing knowledge, customary fishing practices and other forms of living cultural knowledge. Knowledge holders responsible for their transmission have no legal framework to draw upon in asserting their rights or managing access to sensitive cultural material, and no recourse where cultural knowledge is commercialised without consent.

ECOLOGICAL PRESSURE AND RESOURCE DISPUTES: Driven by tourism-related development, land use change and environmental degradation, ecological pressure on natural resources has the potential to exacerbate existing resource disputes within and between communities. Where access to fishing grounds, forests and freshwater is already a source of tension, additional pressure from tourism growth can intensify competition and undermine the customary resource management arrangements that communities rely upon.

The key environmental, social and cultural heritage risks and their initial rating related to the sub-themes within cultural and natural heritage areas of concern are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Cultural and natural heritage risks

Sub-theme	Summary of Initial Assessment	Initial Risk Rating
Cultural and Natural Heritage		
Intangible cultural heritage	Tourism expansion may damage cultural skills and knowledge:	2 (Moderate)

	• Cultural knowledge holders who are unwilling to share their knowledge and stories may result in knowledge being permanently lost • The use of cultural knowledge as part of tourism experiences may generate tension within communities that are opposed to the commercialisation of culture within the tourism sector • An expansion of homestay offerings causes underlying tension between community members.	Under BAU, tourism expansion may generate tension within communities over commercialisation of cultural knowledge and practice, and the transmission of cultural knowledge may weaken
Tangible cultural heritage (sacred sites and archaeological features)	Heritage sites are already at risk from unplanned development and a lack of adequate protection measures. • Inadequate protection results in sites that are damaged • Limited archaeological and heritage expertise results in potentially historically relevant sites being converted without knowledge	3 (High) The management of heritage sites is weak. Professional expertise is not available to support heritage site management.
Cultural Ecosystem Services	(See also Priority Area 1) Ecosystems linked to cultural identity are vulnerable: • Environmental degradation of culturally significant sites in Savusavu • Pressures on tabu areas and totem species in Taveuni and Natewa. • Developers seeking to override fishing rights in Labasa • Limited systematic mapping of cultural-ecological values.	2 (Moderate) Custodianship traditions remain strong, but increasing pressures threaten continuity. Risks to cultural identity will grow if ecosystems continue to degrade under BAU.

4 Strategic Recommendations to the ITMP

To address the risks and impacts identified in the assessment, a series of recommendations have been developed to avoid or reduce the potential for these risks to be realised. The recommendations set out below are those being taken forward through the ITMP. They are organised by ITMP focus areas and are addressed to the ITMP as measures to develop, map, recommend, provide guidance on or support. Each corresponds to one or more tasks in the ITMP scope of works and to the underlying SESA recommendations.

The SESA also identifies a further set of recommendations that fall outside the scope of the ITMP. These are retained in the main report as broader measures needed to strengthen the enabling environment for successful ITMP implementation over the longer term. They are directed to the Government of Fiji and to other components of the TDPVL, including for consideration in subsequent phases of the program, and are not reproduced in this summary.

The recommendations were developed from the risk assessment findings and validated through stakeholder engagement processes. The success of the ITMP as a planning instrument will depend critically on the breadth and quality of ownership it generates across government agencies, private sector businesses and the communities of Vanua Levu and Taveuni.

4.1 Recommendations: Spatial and Infrastructure Planning

The ITMP is tasked to undertake spatial and infrastructure planning for the Northern Division, with detailed five-year plans for the Key Tourism Areas of Savusavu, Natewa Peninsula, Labasa and Taveuni. This includes geo-spatial investment planning for public infrastructure and essential services, detailed urban town plans for Savusavu and Labasa, and a phased infrastructure and financing plan. The SESA recommendations for this workstream are intended to ensure that spatial planning decisions are grounded in environmental, social and cultural heritage evidence, and that infrastructure sequencing is driven by key environmental and social factors to ensure that it actively accounts for and reduces rather than accelerates the risks identified in this assessment.

Table 9: SESA Recommendations for ITMP Spatial Infrastructure and Planning Workstream

ITMP Work Area	SESA Recommendation
Spatial and Infrastructure Planning Workstream	
Zoning, no-go areas and carrying capacity	Consolidate existing climate vulnerability assessments, ecosystem assessments and address baseline data gaps for biodiversity and ecosystem values including reef condition, species distribution, forest condition, tabu areas and invasive species, to inform spatial planning. Define and map mandatory no-go or limited use zones for ecologically sensitive and culturally significant areas, including (as may be appropriate) KBAs, LMMAs, MPAs, critical forest habitats, species-specific habitats, seabird nesting sites, wetlands and cultural heritage sites, and recommend additional measures to protect biodiversity (including recommendations for carrying capacity assessments for high value and key areas), trail management and development restrictions as appropriate. Develop zoning guidance establishing minimum coastal setback distances, habitat-sensitive design requirements and integration of mangrove belts, riparian vegetation and other nature-based solutions, building on existing Fiji Government guidance and taking account of land legacy issues and cultural heritage sites through coordination with TLTB, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Fiji Museum. Develop detailed spatial maps as guidance for investors, developers and government agencies, identifying areas vulnerable to flooding, storm surges, cyclones and landslides, and including clear no-go zones and areas that should be restricted for tourism development, including where safe access and mobility constraints may disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.
Infrastructure phasing and waste management	Integrate threshold capacity needs for wastewater treatment, faecal sludge management and solid waste infrastructure using topography, haulage distances and settlement density analysis to guide sequencing, and identify priority zones for drainage and stormwater upgrades within the five-year and twenty-five-year infrastructure phasing plans. Use as a driver for infrastructure development in the ITMP. Recommend strengthening requirements for tourism approvals and permitting to include demonstrate a feasible desludging access and waste service access, onsite containment, safe wastewater management and water efficiency, particularly outside WAF service zones.

	Map all current and proposed infrastructure relative to critical ecosystems and tourism viability and use their vulnerability to climate and disaster risk impacts as a driver or constraint to infrastructure development.
Climate and disaster risk integration	Ensure preferred development scenario explicitly include development restrictions and conditions related to biodiversity conservation, climate change and natural hazard risk mitigations, carrying capacity assessments, and environmental and archaeological impact assessment, with a natural hazards risk management plan that incorporates universal design principles and safe access requirements for workers, visitors and communities.
Integration with existing planning frameworks	Articulate how ITMP investment sequencing can integrate the applicable principles with in the Program Land Acquisition and Resettlement Framework, particularly in relation to land legacy issues and informal users, and apply those principles in future spatial planning decisions.
Workforce, training and social infrastructure	Develop a Northern Division tourism workforce plan modelling ten to fifteen year occupational demand. Recommend coordination with national labour mobility programmes, and integrate tourism employment projections and anticipated jobseeker in-migration into spatial planning and infrastructure sequencing. Provide recommendations to strengthen and upgrade tourism training facilities across the Northern Division, and for the location of training facilities, enterprise support hubs, worker housing and essential services in line with projected labour inflows, factored into costing and investment sequencing.
MSMEs and inclusive participation	Integrate MSME and informal-worker considerations into tourism zoning and infrastructure planning, ensuring market spaces, jetties, wharves and transport hubs are designed for safe, accessible and affordable participation in tourism value chains, and ensure links through the MSME support activities prioritising women-led, youth-led and disability-inclusive enterprises.
Urban upgrading: Labasa	Use hydrological data to identify safe and accessible routes and public spaces for all users. Revise the Labasa municipal spatial plan through a participatory process including women, youth and people with disabilities, incorporating hydrological assessment, updated zoning and safeguard frameworks.

4.2 Recommendations: Policy and Governance

The ITMP is required to undertake a thorough analysis of the existing institutional, regulatory, policy and legal framework governing tourism and spatial development in the Northern Division, identify gaps and deficiencies, and provide recommendations for reform. This includes assessment of zoning and building codes, tourism licensing and certification, and the alignment of sectoral and national plans. The SESA recommendations for this workstream identify the specific policy instruments, coordination mechanisms and regulatory standards that must be in place if tourism growth is to be managed consistently and equitably across the region.

Table 10: SESA Recommendations for ITMP Policy and Governance Workstream

ITMP Work Area	SESA Recommendation
Policy and Governance Workstream	
Tourism standards and regulatory reform	Embed within the proposed tourism standards, as ITMP criteria for new developments, biodiversity safeguards (ICZM principles, ridge to reef, ecosystem-based adaptation, catchment restoration, biosecurity protocols), pollution, waste and energy standards (including feasible desludging and safe wastewater management), hazard mapping, nature-based solutions, coastal setback buffers, marine management and cultural heritage management. Develop tourism-specific guidelines for noise, light, waste, water, energy and generator emissions for eco-lodges, marinas and coastal resorts. Support the introduction of tiered commercial water tariffs for high-consumption tourism operators, paired with equity safeguards for households. As part of proposed tourism standards, develop codes of conduct for wildlife interaction including whale, dolphin, manta and turtle-based tourism in Natewa, the Somosomo Strait and along the Great Sea Reef. Aligned to proposed tourism standards, develop guidance for strengthened safeguarding for tourism operators on the social components of the EIA process, covering labour standards, occupational health and safety including mandatory OHS training, PSEAH policies and accessible worker complaint channels. Recommend that medium and large tourism projects prepare a Workforce and Inclusion Plan.
Institutional coordination and destination management	Provide recommendations to strengthen coordination across all agencies involved in development planning and approval, to assess cumulative impacts and integrate natural hazards, climate resilience, access and safeguarding considerations, through a whole-of-government destination management approach, and recommend establishing a Northern Tourism Safeguarding (Environmental and Social) Working Group within the ITMP governance structure.
Climate-resilient permitting	Provide recommendations to ensure that infrastructure proposed in high-risk areas proceeds only after demonstrating the use of climate-resilient design incorporating universal design principles and safe evacuation routes, and that permitting decisions incorporate baseline water quality data, contamination risk mapping, hazard mapping and monitoring indicators for cumulative impact management.
Land, benefit sharing and indigenous rights	Align the ITMP with the National Sustainable Tourism Framework, the Vanua-based Tourism Framework, , and work with TLTB, iTAB and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to promote tourism models that empower iTaukei landowning units to develop and manage tourism partnerships, including guidance for community-based operators and homestay providers. Provide recommendations to mandate that all infrastructure projects identified in the ITMP requiring land acquisition or displacement adhere to the correct national processes and implement Free, Prior and Informed Consent style processes with thorough social safeguards assessments.
Sustainable agriculture and watershed management	Provide guidance to promote sustainable agriculture, agro-forestry and watershed management, supporting the expansion of nature-based solutions to reduce soil loss, sedimentation, flooding and coastal erosion risk.

	Prioritise initiatives that protect the livelihoods of communities, particularly women, dependent on nearshore ecosystems.
Local government and community capacity	Strengthen local government and community capacity for inclusive tourism development by recommending awareness initiatives, planning literacy support and mechanisms to participate meaningfully in land use decisions and monitoring of tourism impacts. Make recommendations to strengthen provincial tourism forums and district council advisory committees to provide oversight, monitor standards and support dispute resolution, ensuring representation from women's groups, youth, rural and maritime communities and MSMEs.

4.3 Recommendations: Capacity and Community Development

The ITMP is required to prepare both an Institutional Development Programme and a Capacity Building Programme, covering relevant government institutions, state-owned enterprises, the private sector and local communities including indigenous peoples. These programmes must ensure that all stakeholders are ready and capable to implement the ITMP. The SESA recommendations for this workstream identify the priority capacity gaps across regulatory agencies, iTaukei institutions, the tourism workforce and community-based operators that these programmes must address.

Table 11: SESA Recommendations for ITMP Capacity and Community Development Workstream

ITMP Work Area	SESA Recommendation
Capacity and Community Development Workstream	
Institutional strengthening and compliance	Design an Institutional Development Programme to strengthen awareness of regenerative tourism and improve the monitoring and enforcement capabilities of relevant agencies including Provincial Offices, Town Councils, MECC, MEPI, MSAF and Police to ensure consistent compliance with environment, labour and safeguarding standards in tourism hotspots.
Regulatory and assessment capacity	Provide recommendations as to how the Government and the Program can strengthen the capacity of government agencies, for example the Department of Town and Country Planning, Department of Environment and the Fiji Museum, to conduct rigorous assessments and enforce regulations.
Land use planning and grievance mechanisms	Provide recommendations as to how the Government and the Program can strengthen existing multi-stakeholder committees for integrated land use planning and conflict resolution, and establish transparent consultation within ITMP consultation for discussions relating to ecosystems of high biodiversity or cultural value.
Disaster risk management capacity	Provide recommendations to strengthen the capacity of organisations and businesses, including community-based operators, to engage with NDMO and the cluster system to develop Business Continuity Plans.
iTaukei institutional capacity	Provide recommendations for investment training and capacity building for iTaukei institutions including iTAB, Provincial Councils and village and mataqali leaders in sustainable land management, contract negotiation, business development and

	financial management, including support for communities to manage lease revenues and to strengthen the capacity of these institutions to use community development planning tools to guide the use of lease revenues for shared priorities
Women's economic empowerment	Aligned to the National Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment, recommend the design of mentoring and leadership pipelines for women in tourism, accessible training pathways, representation targets, and accessible childcare and transport options.
Labour mobility reintegration	Provide recommendations for establishing structured reintegration pathways for returning labour mobility workers, including recognition of prior learning from overseas experience and technical support to channel skills into supervisory, training or enterprise development roles.
Community-based tourism and cultural custodianship	Scale up successful public-private-community partnership and ecotourism models including Lavena, Bouma and Namena and replicate at other sites through ITMP-supported incentives. Build community awareness of the cultural significance of flagship species to reinforce stewardship and integrate into tourism experiences. Promote regenerative tourism models that reinforce custodianship, including the designation and expansion of tabu areas, LMMAs and MPAs. Support locally led conservation tourism initiatives such as dolphin conservation levies and trek fees supporting Tagimaucia protection. Require extensive consultation and FPIC-style processes before approving tourism development in communally managed ecosystems or areas of cultural significance. Empower communities to act as primary custodians and guides for cultural sites.

4.4 Recommendations: Cross Cutting Priorities

Across all workstreams, the ITMP is required to adopt an integrated approach that links spatial planning, infrastructure investment, institutional development and community engagement into a coherent framework for sustainable tourism development. The SESA identifies a set of priorities including conservation financing, destination branding, monitoring and business continuity that cut across individual workstreams and must be embedded as explicit commitments within the ITMP rather than treated as secondary considerations in any single component.

Table 12: SESA Recommendations for ITMP Cross Cutting Priorities

ITMP Work Area	SESA Recommendation
Cross Cutting Across Workstreams	
Tourism-conservation linkages	Ensure the ITMP explicitly links tourism to conservation through the establishment of a flagship species framework including Tagimaucia, the swallowtail butterfly, turtles and dolphins, identifying options to expand conservation leases, designate protected areas and embed ridge-to-reef and ecosystem-based adaptation principles throughout.

Conservation financing	Develop recommendations on appropriate levies or alternative financing mechanisms tied to the conservation of flagship species and sites.
Market positioning and destination branding	Promote regenerative, nature and adventure-based, community-led tourism models that build on the Northern Division's distinctive strengths. Develop guidelines and marketing protocols to ensure tourism activities respect and actively promote iTaukei culture, traditions and values, supporting the revival of traditional practices and facilitating formal long-term partnerships between operators, iTaukei landowning units and local communities.
Monitoring framework	Ensure baseline environmental, social and cultural data collection, disaggregated by gender, is integrated into the ITMP monitoring framework with clear indicators for five-year and twenty-five-year review cycles, tracking cumulative and induced impacts across tourism growth scenarios.
Business continuity for community-based operators	Strengthen the capacity of community-based operators specifically to develop Business Continuity Plans, ensuring smaller and more vulnerable enterprises are not excluded from disaster preparedness frameworks.

5 Next Steps

This document constitutes the interim SESA for the Na Vualiku Fiji Tourism Development Programme. It represents the first stage of a phased assessment process designed to provide a continuously updated evidence base for the strategic planning of sustainable tourism in the Northern Division.

The immediate next step is the preparation of the Integrated Tourism Master Plan with full incorporation of the SESA findings and recommendations. Once the draft ITMP is developed, the SESA team will:

- assess the extent to which the recommendations set out in this interim SESA are incorporated into the draft ITMP;
- identify any areas where the ITMP introduces new strategic options, risk mitigation measures or development scenarios not considered in this interim assessment;
- update and deepen the risk analysis in light of the ITMP's proposed spatial planning decisions, investment priorities and governance arrangements; and
- produce a final, integrated SESA that is validated through consultations and assesses the extent to which the ITMP incorporates the recommendations, identifies residual environmental or social risk areas stemming from the ITMP and provides measures for assessing risks throughout ITMP implementation.
- Publicly disclose Final SESA.

