

I am compelled to write this submission solely on behalf of the Indigenous Fijian heritage and Fijian migrants residing in Victoria, Australia, whose lives and cultures are impacted by kava.

In their latest meeting, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the Fijian Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, addressed this issue, thus the Phase 2 of this project. It is highly appreciated not only to see some positive steps in this scheme but to see the relationship of the two neighbouring countries very encouraging and empowering.

As a Fijian, residing in Victoria, Australia, for thirty-odd years, and worked in some remote indigenous communities, it has given me some insight to the lives and characters in isolated communities of the First Peoples of Australia.

Currently, as an Elder and Leader of some Fijian communities in Victoria as follows –

1. Consultant and Chairman of investment for the Lau Provincial Association Inc.
2. Advisor – Victorian Fijian Association
3. Chairman – Development – Keysborough Social Club
4. Elder – Dandenong Regional Uniting Church
5. Elder – Lewe Tolu Va-Kalou Congregation. This is the Fijian congregation at Dandenong Regional Uniting Church

The above registered associations and groups have networks throughout Australia.

We appreciate the change from 2kg to 4 kg in Phase 1 of the scheme. The demand for kava has not reduced. This probably because of –

1. Irregular travel to Fiji
2. Not all travellers return with 4kg of kava. For some, it is due to their faith which prohibits them from using kava.
3. The current prices of kava in Fiji is, \$F120 - \$F150, a kilogram. Bear in mind the majority of workers are paid under the poverty line, about \$F2.50 an hour. The increased importation of kava will assist in lifting some of them to a better quality of life.
4. Let us not forget the current situation we are faced with COVID-19 and its impact globally.

We also sympathise with the plight of the indigenous Australians in Arnhem land (Northern Territory) whose reports and recommendations painted an adverse report focused on kava. When it is undeniable that before the introduction of kava, alcoholism was rife in most of their communities and their reports should be challenged, and compared. Please do not scapegoat kava for the true culprit that harms and kills is alcoholism.

Unfortunately, kava has been used as a scapegoat which misinformed and undermine the traditional and cultural value of kava which is embedded historically in the Indigenous Fijian, Tongan, Samoan cultures and traditions including in our faith religions since the dawn of civilisation. Kava was used in ceremonies that has brought peace and stability to the South

Pacific regions which we enjoy today. The islanders are also known as God-fearing people for their humbleness, loving and caring.

Hopefully, the Phase 2 of this pilot project will encourage Pacific Islanders to better their relationship not only in Australia but to their homeland where blood relatives are living. Islanders should also be encouraged by the Australian Government to set up new business ventures with permits to import. To be self-reliant and better opportunity for employment to minimise dependence on government handouts. In return assist with relatives and families back in the homeland.

The commercial importation Phase 2 of this scheme, not only can benefit the Fijians in Australia, but the Australian Government and the rural farmers, the middlemen in Fiji and the peoples back home.

Currently, the Indigenous Fijians in Australia, and related communities are unable to fully express their cultural use of kava due to its restrictions and availability and price, about \$A200 a kilogram.

Therefore we compile this submission and propose the commercial implementation of kava Phase 2 Pilot scheme by Islanders of Fijian, Tongan and Samoan heritage in Australia to fulfil their ceremonial cultures and religious events and set up kava businesses in their communities

The significance of kava is deeply rooted and embedded in the Fijian way of life. For centuries, it was exclusively used during traditional cultural ceremonies. While it remains an integral part of Fijian customs (at births, initiation into adulthood, weddings, deaths; introductions, conflict resolutions, mediation, consultations; kava is used as a mark of acceptance, recognition, endorsement and honour), the use of the drink has extended beyond the ambits of traditional and cultural protocols. It has evolved into a popular social drink in the modern Fiji, known for its calming effects that widely appeal to working urbanites.

Renowned Pacific educator, Konai Helu Thaman (1992) in discussing the value of culture quoted 'we in Fiji and in the South Pacific must not allow our own cultures to be undermined. Our cultures make us what we are. Without them, we are like debris in the ocean. Culture is the soul of the people. It is what we were, what we are and with appropriate education, what we can become...'.

Hopefully, this opportunity of Phase 2 will uplift and foster better relationship with other communities this less frustrations and embarrassment dur to the lack of availability.

Let us open up the market to implement Phase 2 of allowing commercial importation of kava.

Currently, the Fijian (and related) communities in Australia are unable to fully express their cultural uses of kava due to its unavailability and restricted use. Thus, it is considered that the proposed increase from 2kgs to 4kgs is inadequate not only in terms of meeting the needs for the personal use of by our Fijian and Pacific Island communities in Australia for

their social and ceremonial functions but also to allow for meaningful information to be collected and evaluated to address the remaining considerations for the pilot program. Kava is prepared as a beverage with the kavalactones being extracted with water for consumption during our cultural and traditional ceremonies as well as for our social gatherings. In this context, kava is seldomly consumed alone but customarily by a group of individuals or communities at a meeting or gatherings or “kava sessions”.

Question 1: Are you supportive of the use of import permits (option 2) to allow kava importation to be controlled and monitored?

Answer: I am supportive of the import permits (option 2) to allow kava importation to be controlled and monitored, due to the quality and quantity of kava. I am against the over flooding of the commercial market with poor or substandard kava. There are three grades (1) root, (2) stalk and (3) mixture of both (1) & (2). This could also eliminate the ‘black market’ and the huge prices which affects communities who are not aware of better prices.

Question 2: Under option 2 what requirements or conditions do you think are responsible and necessary to be placed on commercial entities in order to allow them to import commercial qualities of kava?

Answer: Permit holders / Importers to have better understanding about the significant importance and value of kava, culturally/traditionally, because kava is embedded in the indigenous (native Fijian) lives and culture. Hence the indigenous Fijians should be encouraged to hold permits as they are the users and consumers of kava. Although other ethnic groups drink kava but mostly sell them for commercial purpose. As migrants still have families/relatives whom we visit or communicate often. The importer could encourage the commercial farming in communities.

Question 3: In addition to state and territory government restrictions on the supply and consumption of kava within their jurisdictions, what other restrictions should be imposed on holders of permits for importing kava into Australia?

Answer: The consumption of kava cannot be used with any other beverage except cold (tap) water. Kava isn't a drink to be taken with alcoholic drinks. It needs to be introduced slowly to the communities. Perhaps look at ways of educating people about kava sessions in the communities. It is to be consumed in a group, or family environment, for relaxation and open discussion of events.

Question 4: Should kava be sold with further warnings about potential harm, such as those in the food standards? What are your views on what these warnings should be?

Answer: In addition to the potential harms, its effect is not intoxicating like alcohol. Alcohol only takes a few minutes to reach the human brain. If drunk in quantity it affects the way you think, feel and behave. Some may become aggressive or violent. However, kava has a calming effect but can have other effects -

1. The long hours of socialising, 3 – 4 hours a session, can effect family life. Menfolk tend to sit in a ‘grog session’ while the wife is at home.
2. If kava is consumed constantly and over long periods it can cause the drying of the skin.
3. Inflamed eyes and a lethargic attitude
4. Can cause headaches if taken on an empty stomach. It is recommended it is taken with, or after, food consumption.

Question 5: What are your views on the potential health, social and cultural impacts of kava, and do you have any evidence to share?

Answer: My views on health, social and cultural impacts of kava. Like every consumable commodity, excessive use will have some adverse effect, therefore consumption must be in moderation. The impact socially and culturally is well known historically. The indigenous Fijian had significant cultural value of kava embedded in their lives. Ceremonial events and gatherings were such that the preparation/presentation of kava was integral to the gathering. As an indigenous Fijian and consumer of ceremonial kava due to my status in the Fijian communities and Elder of Religious group I am able to provide this as evidence.

Question 6: Are you concerned about any particular risks that may be caused by allowing the commercial importation of kava?

Answer: My only concern as a Fijian that the market could be flooded with poor quality kava for economic gain, but have no value or interest in the quality of kava that will end up with the indigenous Fijian community in Australia.

Question 7: Do you have any suggestions for how to limit any potential negative impacts or risks of using kava and / or commercially importing kava into Australia?

Answer: To limit any potential negative impacts or risks of using kava. Permits should be given to Pacific Islander communities and capable individuals who are able to set up and monitor the phase 2 of the pilot scheme and to be held accountable for the supply of data when required.

Another thought would be to provide education and awareness programs to the Australian community emphasising the positive effects of the moderate use of kava.

Question 8: What benefits may be achieved from commercially importing kava into Australia?

Answer: The benefits are tremendous –

1. The continuation of Fijian customs and the ability to pass these down to younger generations. Our heritage will continue.
2. An employment opportunity. Businesses can be set up to import and sell kava.
3. The permit issued will regulate prices and better quality of kava in the community
4. Easy to monitor, control and analyse data for health, social and cultural impacts.
5. In Fiji, kava can be taken as a relaxant, sedative, pain reliever, and to aid sleep.
6. Kava is well known to relieve stress and is an alternative anti-anxiety treatment; other uses include treatment for muscle pain

7. With the employment opportunities there would be less dependence on government handouts.

9: What businesses may be involved in the commercial importation and supply of kava and how will kava potentially be priced, marketed and retailed?

Answer: New businesses to be set up for kava by those potential permit holders for kava phase 2 pilot in the communities of consumers. This is to import high quality at affordable price to users in Australia. Prices will be calculated at:

1. Purchase of kava from farmers
2. Transportation and customers fees
3. Add 50 – 70% profit.

Marketed: to be supplied to Fijian communities in Australia, where it can be retailed.

Question 10: What methods should be used to monitor and evaluate the success and impacts of the pilot?

Answer: Methods to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the pilot. The wholesaler and retailers should provide clear records of business and the communities involved.

Question 11: What methods should be used to monitor and evaluate the health, social, economic and regulatory impacts of kava consumption during the pilot?

Answer: Methods used in my opinion of this pilot is the recording of the following:

1. Sources of purchases, that is farmers / middlemen, etc.
2. Permit holders information
3. Purchase prices and costs of handling/transportation
4. Outlet markets in Australia, that is communities/clients/customers, hence easy access to data and evaluations
5. Selling prices in Australian dollars depends on the conversion rates and transport cost plus 50 – 70% profit margin

Question 12: Who may be able to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot?

Answer: The permit holder who is the source of distribution and his knowledge of the community that he supplies to during the period of the pilot.

Question 13: What data should be collected to effectively measure the health, social, and economic and regulatory impacts of kava?

Answer: Data collected should reflect the following:

1. The supplier/permit holder information
2. Date of purchase/delivery

3. Consumption details, that is ceremonial events, religious gatherings or socialising with family and friends (this record could make it easy to trace/track down the impact on health and social issues if required and its economic benefits).

Feedback:

I would appreciate if we could be considered to import kava for commercial purposes as I am an indigenous Fijian Australian to ensure the proper recording of data required and the wellbeing of Australians that use kava in whatever capacity, that is health, culture, social events, etc. This will also allow me and my colleagues to write a booklet on its preparation and use in communities that are interested to use kava for socialising in communities ravaged by alcoholism and drug abuse.

I am also prepared to be interviewed by the agency concerned for more impact of kava in the Australian Fijian communities.