



VBTC No Longer 'Referee' and 'Player'

Power to approve and give licences transferred from VTBC to TRR

By Godwin Ligo

THE PARLIAMENT YESTERDAY unanimously approved the transfer of power to approve and grant licenses from the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (VBTC) to the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR).

This means that VBTC is no longer both regulator and operator.

When presenting the Bill for the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Broadcasting (Amendment) Act No.

of 2018, Prime Minister Charlot Salwai as Minister responsible for Media in Vanuatu, explained that the intention of the bill is simply to remove the power to approve and grant licenses to establish media organizations in Vanuatu, and to avoid conflict of interest in being both regulator and operator at the same time.

Many comments were made in support to the bill and as well as questions raised in regard to the state own broadcasting coverage to the country.

Some MPs raised concerns over lack of reception from the VBTC radio and television coverages to some areas and the quality of transmission services. In response to all comments and queries, the Prime Minister pointed out technical difficulties and the need to invest more funds into the government-owned broadcaster so as to improve technical facilities that will enable wider and better coverage of both radio and television to the whole country.

At the same time, PM

Salwai assured the MPs that improvements have been made to turn the situation around.

However, he admitted that the state own broadcaster is still faced with financial difficulties that need to be addressed and redressed in order to provide wide and quality coverages of both radio and television.

He also told the MPs that the situation with VBTC has even reach the state where some donor partners that have assisted the state own broadcaster in the past were

not pleased with the way assistance they have provided have been utilized and some, he said have approached the government for their assistance to be returned, but he did not specifically name the donor partners and what areas of assistance they want returned.

PM Salwai also explained to the MPs in parliament yesterday that the medium and shortwave frequencies equipment, including towers on Efate and in Santo, are old and not easy to repair and replace.

He said these broadcast equipment are no longer easy to find with overseas suppliers, but assured MPs and the people of Vanuatu that in its 100 Day Plan, the current government is committed to seeing radio and tv coverage reach the whole country during its term.

The prime minister also reminded the MPs that politics and political interference has contributed and is largely to be blamed in the difficult managerial, financial and technical operations of VBTC.