



PACIFIC OCEAN ALLIANCE MEETING

Opening Statement by Pacific Ocean Commissioner

Dame Meg Taylor

3 October 2019
Suva

- Excellencies,
- The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, H.E. Amb Peter Thomson,
- Distinguished members of the POA,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

1. A very good morning to you all.
2. In my capacity as Pacific Ocean Commissioner, I welcome you all to the headquarters of the Pacific Islands Forum, for this meeting of the Pacific Ocean Alliance.
3. The key purpose of this Alliance is to advance the Forum Leaders' vision under the Framework for the Pacific Oceanscape, which is for 'A secure future for Pacific Island Countries and Territories based on sustainable development, management

and conservation of our ocean’. The role of the Pacific Ocean Alliance in advancing this vision is critical for ensuring coherence, cooperation and coordination across the multiple sectors and cross-cutting thematic issues that make up and, or impact our ocean and islands economies, societies and ecosystems - to enable concerted action as one interconnected ocean and blue continent.

4. In this regard, the significant contributions made by the Pacific Ocean Alliance in the Pacific preparations to the first UN Ocean Conference in 2017, co-chaired by the governments of Fiji and Sweden and under the leadership of Ambassador Thomson, then President of the United Nations General Assembly provides example of the utility and value of the Alliance and must be acknowledged.
5. Additionally, I would like to highlight and acknowledge with appreciation the important role of the POA in contributing to the voice and strength of the Blue Pacific in the BBNJ negotiations. Pacific priorities, which the POA helped to identify and strengthen, are now well reflected in the negotiations – and demonstrate again the need for cooperation and coordination for a strong, collective Pacific position.
6. Colleagues, today we meet at a particularly crucial moment in the history of our region, a moment of great risk but also of great potential. Indeed, we should begin our plenary discussions over the next two days with the acknowledgement that the context we now face has grown more complex and more challenging than when the Framework for the Pacific Oceanscape was endorsed by Leaders in 2010. For example, while climate change has been a long-standing issue for our region, the UNSG Climate Change Action Summit held last week in New York reinforced the growing global consensus that we now face a climate *emergency*, with

commitments that need to be more ambitious and action more urgent to be able to address this emergency.

7. Last week also saw the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change special report on the impacts of climate change on oceans and the cryosphere. While the previous IPCC special report on 1.5 degrees highlighted the dire consequences of global temperature rise for our region, the report on oceans further contextualizes those consequences for us as people of the largest oceanic continent on our Blue Planet.
8. Furthermore, in addition to the ongoing negative impacts of climate change on our ocean, we also face challenges arising from intensifying geopolitical and geostrategic competition in and around our region. These challenges have potentially critical implications for our ability to control our ocean space and for our ability to maintain our solidarity as one Blue Pacific. In this context then, the typical challenges the POA seeks to address in terms of acting as one interconnected ocean continent and strengthening integrated ocean management of key relevant sectors of fisheries, minerals, transport, tourism, energy and environment become both more complex and more urgent than ever.
9. Indeed, it was within this increasingly complex and urgent context that Forum Leaders gathered in Tuvalu in August this year under the theme “Securing our Future in the Pacific”. Leaders noted that securing the future of the Blue Pacific cannot simply be left to chance, but rather requires a long-term vision, a carefully considered regionalism strategy, and most importantly a collective commitment to achieve it. Subsequently, Leaders endorsed the development of a 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

10. One can readily see the synergies between the Forum Leaders theme and 2050 strategy and the Framework for the Pacific Oceanscape. Not surprisingly then, the ocean features as a key priority for the 2050 strategy. Specifically, Leaders identified the protection of our ocean health and integrity, as well as the sustainable management of our island and ocean resources as two cornerstone priorities for the strategy.

11. As such, the principles and priorities of the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape remain important and relevant to the development and progress of a 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific. In particular and most urgently, priority 6 ‘Adapting to a rapidly changing environment’ and priority 1 ‘Jurisdiction Rights and Responsibilities’. Therefore, it is fitting for us to take these few days to look at where we are, to recognize what we have done well, where we need to do more to improve our collective actions, as well as determine together where we want our Blue Pacific to be in 1, 10, 20, 30 years from now. I am encouraged to hear that many of you participated in the workshop on Tuesday and Wednesday on the 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific, which will have helped to lay the bedrock for these discussions.

12. Another important aspect of our current context that I wish to stress is that in their endorsement of the development of a 2050 Strategy, Forum Leaders noted that the strategic value the Pacific region currently holds provides unprecedented opportunities and leverage to secure the future of our region in the Pacific. This is important for us to keep in mind as we develop our collective strategies for engaging in the series of key international engagements for the ocean in 2019 – the Our Ocean Conference in Oslo in a few weeks-time and COP 25 in Chile – and in 2020 the ongoing BBNJ negotiations; the second UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon; the

launch of the UN Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable Development; and the Our Ocean Conference in Palau.

13. In summary, as the Pacific's Ocean Commissioner I am of the view that while our current context means that the task of securing our future as the Blue Pacific requires unprecedented and urgent action, we – as a continent with natural capital, and as a collective - have never been better placed than we are now to drive and demand such action. The future of our ocean continent is well and truly in our hands.

14. Therefore, come Friday afternoon, it is my hope that we will have a clear picture of what we need to do collectively and individually to further support the health, productivity and resilience of our Blue Pacific continent and adjacent high seas, and its resources on and within - for the benefit of our generation and those to come after us.

15. At the conclusion of our meeting let us all ensure that our efforts do not end here, but that we will continue to work hand in hand including in the follow-up and review discussions to support our efforts in key upcoming ocean events. I understand that OPOC has been working with an inclusive, representative Reference Group that helped to put together this POA Meeting. I look forward to a Reference Group continuing after this meeting to help coordinate the implementation of the commitments we have made. To that end, I will look to the Reference Group to come up with an action plan for my consideration and will have this circulated to you all to help inform our preparations for 2020.

16. I thank you for your eager participation and best wishes for the meeting and leave you all with an inspirational quote of Epeli Hau'ofa that is reflected in the

Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape that is fitting for this meeting, the days ahead and the place in history that we find ourselves in today, and I quote

17. “Ocean is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves.” - unquote

18. And with those few words, I declare this 2019 Pacific Ocean Alliance Meeting – Open for frank, constructive exchange and outcomes in order that we may secure our future as the Blue Pacific Continent – Our People, Our Place and Our Prospects.

END.