

Communiqué
SPREP Ministers' High-Level Talanoa 2021
Accelerating Actions for a Resilient Blue Pacific

At the 30th SPREP Meeting's Ministers and High-Level Representatives Talanoa held virtually in Samoa on Friday 10 September 2021, Ministers and Ministerial Representatives adopted the following **Communiqué**:

We, the Ministers, and High-Level Representatives of: **American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vanuatu and, Wallis & Futuna**¹.

Reaffirm: The Pacific Ocean is the lifeblood of our society. It provides our cultural and historical identity since time immemorial and unites our islands in common purpose;

Note with alarm the unprecedented severity and frequency of threats the Pacific Ocean faces from climate change and other anthropogenic stressors;

Restate our commitment to the "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent";

(PP4) Recognise that a resilient Blue Pacific is necessary to meet the extraordinary and unabating challenges of our times;

Commit to acting now to identify and accelerate actions in order to achieve a resilient Blue Pacific;

Appeal for the mobilisation of all States towards the conclusion in 2022 of the Agreement under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of the marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction;

Further Note the United Nations Declaration of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030, providing a framework to ensure that ocean science can fully support countries' actions to sustainably manage the Oceans;

and, in relation to the following topics-

1. Ocean and Climate Change

Welcome the "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent" in order to protect people, place and prospects of the Blue Pacific will reinforce the prioritisation of ocean and climate change considerations into all regional and national policies and plans, both public and private;

Reaffirm that the Pacific region's most important natural resource is the ocean, and its marine resources and ecosystems, which underpins our identity and community livelihoods;

Reiterate that the ocean plays a critical role in combating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and supporting sustainable development;

¹ Fiji and Nauru participated in the Talanoa but are not a part of the Communiqué.

Reaffirm that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the Blue Pacific;

Encourage all Parties to the UNFCCC to ensure that COP 26 recognises and advances the work on Oceans in the UNFCCC, recognising its centrality to the Blue Pacific Continent;

Note the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders:

- a) Called for “all Parties to the Paris Agreement to ensure that COP 26 concludes negotiation on the Paris Rulebook, delivers an outcome that promotes stronger transparency and pursues efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and mobilises scaled-up climate finance for adaptation from all sources,” and
- b) Recalled the call in the *Kainaki II Declaration* “for the international community to continue efforts towards meeting their climate finance commitment of US \$100 billion per year from a variety of sources and accelerate support for the work of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts”;

Note the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ endorsement of the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment, which seeks to reduce the human and economic cost of severe weather, water and ocean events across Pacific Island communities, by strengthening national meteorological and hydrological organisations and their partnerships with national disaster management organisations;

2. Ocean and Pollution

Note that marine pollution - including plastics, nuclear waste, radioactive and other contaminants, hazardous and noxious substances, oil spills, and contamination from World War II wrecks, other shipwrecks and unexploded ordnances - produces negative impacts on food security, human health, biodiversity, livelihoods and culture. Entire ecosystems and species are placed at risk as well as the people whose livelihoods and economic development depend on them;

Affirm that as the Blue Pacific, we are implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan 2018-2025, however, we recognise that the interconnectivity of the world’s oceans means that marine pollution as a transboundary problem, to be effectively addressed, requires the coordinated and effective involvement of all countries;

Urge Pacific rim countries and flag States to expeditiously implement relevant measures to prevent and effectively manage marine pollution and marine litter in accordance with international law;

Note that plastic pollution endangers the health and resilience of nearly every marine ecosystem globally and Pacific Islands Countries contribute as little as 1.3% of the mismanaged plastics in the world’s oceans yet are one of the main recipients of plastics pollution and its impacts²;

Note the “Pacific Regional Declaration on the Prevention of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution and its Impacts” which calls on governments to enter into negotiations regarding a binding global agreement

² Plastic Pollution Prevention in Pacific Island Countries. Environmental Investigation Agency. August 2020. <https://reports.eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/09/Plastic-Prevention-Gap-Analysis-2020.pdf>

on marine litter and plastic pollution, attached in the Annex, is available for voluntary endorsement and will be open for signing until 25 November 2021;

Note the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, which aims to reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero worldwide by 2050;

3. Ocean and Deep-Sea Mining³

Acknowledge that in accordance with international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), countries have the sovereign right to develop the mineral resources of their continental shelf, territorial sea and exclusive economic zone according to their national priorities;

Acknowledge that countries have responsibilities under international law in accordance with UNCLOS regarding the exploitation of resources, noting the Rio Principles and further acknowledging that countries should protect and preserve the marine environment while recognising the potential social and economic benefits of mining activities;

Recognise the International Seabed Authority as the international organisation established under UNCLOS with the mandate to manage the mineral resources in the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction;

Recognise that while deep-sea minerals offer potentially significant economic benefits, the understanding of the ecology of the deep-sea environment and deep-sea mining's adverse effects are poorly understood and recognise the importance of cooperation between members and CROP agencies and the need to develop expertise within the region to provide scientific expert advice with respect to seabed mining, deep-sea ecology and oceanography;

Recall the commitment in the Future we Want (para 158), "to protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations, and to effectively apply an ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach in the management, in accordance with international law, of activities having an impact on the marine environment, to deliver on all three dimensions of sustainable development.";

Note how this aligns with the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape: to "foster stewardship at scale – local, national, regional and international to ensure in perpetuity the health and wellbeing of our ocean and ourselves" and the Vemööre Declaration: "Entrenching a precautionary approach to any proposed deep-sea and seabed mining activities. We acknowledge the imperative for responsible stewardship of deep-sea and seabed environments in our national jurisdictions and on the high seas.";

Encourage members, who are exercising their sovereign right to develop their mineral resources according to their national priorities, in accordance with international law as reflected in UNCLOS, to implement a sound precautionary approach, together with comprehensive scientific analyses of the deep-sea environment and environmental impacts of deep seabed mining and any associated social and economic issues;

Recognise the centrality of UNCLOS in ensuring the protection of our Blue Pacific Continent.

³ France reserves its position on this Topic, pending further consideration

The Ministers, and High-Level Representatives expressed their appreciation to the Secretariat for organising a successful Talanoa and SPREP Meeting.

“Annex”

Endorsed by the Ministers and high-level officials of American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, Vanuatu and, Wallis & Futuna.

PACIFIC REGIONAL DECLARATION ON THE PREVENTION OF MARINE LITTER AND PLASTIC POLLUTION AND ITS IMPACTS

We, representatives of the people of the Pacific region and stewards of the world’s largest ocean, meeting at the **Environment Ministers’ High-Level Talanoa**, 10th September 2021, are deeply concerned about the impacts of plastics and microplastics pollution on our region and that the current patchwork of international legal instruments is not sufficient to prevent the acceleration of these impacts.

Recalling the international commitments made by the Parties to multilateral environmental agreements including – but not limited to - the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992 , the Paris Agreement 2015, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, Basel Convention, International Human Rights instruments, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, SAMOA Pathway and the environmental principles notably the polluter-pays principle, precautionary approach and the inter-generational equity principle.

Further recalling the commitments made by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement 2021, the Parties to the Nouméa Convention 1986, and the Parties to the Waigani Convention 1995, and reaffirming the Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now 2019, the Vemööre Declaration 2020 and the Ocean Day Declaration on Plastic Pollution 2021.

Reiterating our commitment to work to protect our Ocean from harmful plastics through the implementation of our regional strategy Cleaner Pacific 2025, the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021 – 2025, the key actions for Pacific Island Countries and Territories in the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter 2018-2025 notably its support for the development of a global legal framework to address marine litter.

Expressing our grave concern about the environmental, social, cultural, economic, human health and, food security impacts of plastics pollution at each stage of its life cycle on the enjoyment of certain human rights for current and future generations. These impacts are due to linear economic models, disregard for or lack of adequate end-of-life management, insufficient support for the development of sustainable alternatives to plastics, continued production and use of unnecessary or harmful plastics, especially single-use plastic products, and open burning and dumping of plastic waste.

Further expressing our grave concern for migratory marine species such as seabirds, marine turtles and whales as they are especially vulnerable to the impacts of marine plastics through entanglement and ingestion of plastic and reaffirming these species as important cultural icons for Pacific peoples.

Calling specific attention to the fact that notwithstanding that the Pacific island countries contribute as little as 1.3% of global plastic pollution⁴, we in the Pacific region are grossly and disproportionately affected by its impacts, particularly considering that we are not a major producer of plastics and their additives, and emphasizing the Second World Ocean Assessment stating that the highest recorded quantity of floating plastics are in the South Pacific subtropical gyre.

Underlining that marine litter and plastic pollution is a transboundary global issue and that the Pacific region is often the recipient of the pollution, much of which originates thousands of kilometres from our shores and is carried to our countries by atmospheric and oceanic currents.

Deeply concerned about the accelerating rate of plastics consumption and production, underscoring the fact that 50% of all plastics produced are intended for the manufacture of single-use products, that the current 368 million metric tonnes of virgin plastics produced annually is set to double by 2040; that only 9% of all plastics ever produced have been recycled, and 12% have been incinerated; and that 79% of all plastics produced have accumulated in landfills or the environment⁵.

Acknowledging the actions taken to reduce and eliminate single use and problematic plastics in the region and the need for more ambitious action and global and regional policy frameworks such as extended producer responsibility, container deposit systems and consumer awareness and responsibility.

Convinced that despite some progress at national and regional levels, the marine litter and plastic pollution crisis requires a dedicated and coordinated global and regional governance response with the support of all States and other institutional global and regional stakeholders.

Acknowledging the role played by all stakeholders throughout the full plastics lifecycle, from extraction, production, trade, manufacturing, consumption to waste management and environmental legacy and the need for global intervention and support for pollution prevention at each stage.

Cognizant of the vital global, regional and local ecosystem services provided by our Ocean and recalling SDG14, we are mindful of our role and responsibility as Ocean stewards to guard our Ocean from plastics pollution if we are to protect our peoples' cultural identity through protection of iconic species, fisheries and tourism industries, livelihoods, food security, and health.

Stressing the importance of incorporating Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations as appropriate and with their free prior and informed consent that have evolved through generations into nature-based solutions for the sustainable conservation of ecosystems.

⁴ <https://reports.eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/09/Plastic-Prevention-Gap-Analysis-2020.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/binding-global-agreement-address-life-cycle-plastics>

Recognizing that plastics and climate change are inextricably linked particularly in their production and disposal, such as incineration, and reiterating that climate change is a top regional priority due to its disproportionately adverse impacts on human-environment relationships and biodiversity in the Pacific region.

Declare that we

Strongly support and urge all United Nations Member States at the Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to support the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to negotiate a new binding global agreement covering the whole life cycle of plastics.

Call for a new binding global agreement on the prevention and reduction of new marine litter and plastic pollution and management of plastic pollution already in our environment, to complement and expand on existing international instruments to cover the full life cycle of plastics.

Call for future discussions on this agreement to consider the need for financial and technical support mechanisms to adapt international science and best practice to the challenges specific to our region, as well as technology transfer and capacity building, and recall the United Nations Environmental Assembly Resolution 2/11 calling on United Nations Member States to consider providing financial assistance in particular to Small Island Developing States to establish and implement necessary policies, regulatory frameworks and measures addressing plastic pollution.

Call for the future discussions on the agreement to consider implementation measures such as national plans and targets to be globally supported and coordinated as well as mechanisms for regular regional monitoring including identification of suitable regional indicator species, and reporting to support the Pacific region in meeting measurable marine litter and plastic pollution elimination targets.

Call for future discussions on the agreement to consider the need for elements such as a reduction of virgin plastic production, the phasing out of toxic and avoidable plastics, problematic and single-use plastic products and additives and the harmonization of design and labelling standards, to support transition to a safe circular global economy and to find alternatives to allow for our continued economic development.

Call on the international community to take urgent and immediate action to help us protect our region and peoples from further marine litter and plastic pollution impacts that threaten our marine ecosystems, marine species, our food security and our health.

Emphasize the need for accessible information and support to scientific research on plastics and plastic pollution data collection on waste plastics and material flows, as well as the development of marine litter and plastic pollution prevention best practice to inform robust evidence based and coherent policy.

Support ambitious policy implementation measures through mechanisms such as national plans, noting the role that private sector can play in helping drive solutions such as product stewardship, including extended producer responsibility and container deposit schemes.

Emphasize that Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations with their free prior and informed consent must be an integral part of the solution to the plastic pollution crisis.