Briefing note for Day 1 of the Pacific Ocean Alliance Meeting

Day 1 Theme: ***"Understanding the status quo, addressing issues and improving means towards accelerated implementation".***

Objectives:

i. Take stock of progress made in advancing regional ocean priorities, particularly progress since the last meeting of the POA in 2019, and identify further action required at the regional and international level, to inform and support collective advocacy and engagement by POA Members at upcoming ocean events.

ii. To strengthen the POA as a robust regional ocean-work coordination mechanism, mandated by Forum Leaders in 2010. The POC will be responsible for driving these reflections moving forward.

POA Criteria:

It is important to assert that, together with the Pacific Ocean Commissioner's guidance, the following criteria were used to help shape the agenda and determine issues for this meeting.

Criteria	
Topics/issues in the agenda should related to one or more of the strategic priorities of the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape, or to a decision by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders	√
Topics/issues are cross-cutting, cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral in nature	√
Topics/issues have identifiable benefit and value for Pacific Island people	√
Topic/issues require broad stakeholder engagement	√

Session 1: Presentation of regional ocean priorities and stock-take on implementation

Background: The previous POA meeting in 2019 discussed various topics including climate change, biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and progress towards FPO and SDG 14. The meeting concluded with a call from the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (POC) to continue collaborative work to contribute to securing the Blue Pacific Continent and delivering on Pacific Leaders regional priorities and commitments. In addition to this it was proposed that OPOC should play a role in coordinating regional preparations for the important meetings that are scheduled. Today we find ourselves in a position to review progress since POA 2019 and work collaboratively towards accelerating delivery for our ocean.

Since the previous POA meeting the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating socio-economic impact on our people, in some cases extenuated by natural disasters. Although in some cases this has constrained action, commitment to the ocean has not diminished. For example, the 2021 Communique from Ministers entitled "Accelerating Actions for a Resilient Blue Pacific" recognized that the "Pacific Ocean is the lifeblood of our society" and a resilient Blue Pacific is necessary to meet the extraordinary and unabating challenges of our times.

The Communique commits to acting now to identify and accelerate actions in order to achieve a resilient Blue Pacific and reaffirms that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the Blue Pacific. The spatial integrity of the region has been enforced through the 20201 Declaration of Preserving maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise intends to maintain established and notified maritime zones in light of climate change-related sea-level rise. Progress has been made towards regional coordination and progressing gender equity and equality in the Pacific maritime sector through the regional Strategy for Pacific Women in maritime 2020-2024.

The PIF leaders Ocean Statement of 2021 positions ecosystem integrity as a prerequisite to sustainable development of the ocean: "the potential of the Ocean to meet sustainable development needs is enormous; but only if our oceans can be restored and maintained to a healthy and productive state". The Statement also recognizes a range of regional priorities, including: biodiversity through commitment to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity framework and a future BBNJ instrument; urgent climate action, including the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue under the UNFCCC; securing the Blue Pacific based on the UN Charter and UNCLOS; conservation and sustainable management of 100% of the Blue Pacific Ocean; promoting maritime connectivity and renewable energy; combatting marine pollution including through the Cleaner Pacific 2025 Strategy; and, access to development finance and blue recovery, including through innovative financial mechanisms.

The 2021 PIF Ocean Statement also reiterates the "collective responsibility and accountability" for stewardship over our ocean. Recognition of the diverse range of stakeholders and interest in the ocean was one of the instigators for Leaders to establish OPOC as a coordinating body for the region, and POA as the stakeholder foundation. With the substantial impact of COVID-19 on the region, collaboration becomes even more of an imperative as a blue recovery will be at the center of socio-economic improvements and this will requires contribution from all parties. This POA meeting is an opportunity to listen to a variety of stakeholders to provide their insights on progress to date, and us to collaboratively target future action towards our Blue Pacific Continent.

Approach/Modality: Session 1 will consist of three different components. Firstly, a plenary presentation will provide an overview of POA 2019 and a stock take on the regional progress since then. Secondly, a suite of presenters representing some of the main stakeholder groups required for a collaborative approach will provide their perspective on progress since the last POA. Finally, delegates will divide into smaller break-out groups to discuss progress and identify possible ways to accelerate delivery for our ocean.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- To provide an overview for POA members of progress since the previous POA meeting in 2019.
- Take stock of progress made in advancing regional ocean coordination, implementation priorities and further actions required at the regional and international level.
- To engage with fellow stakeholders to identify possible solutions to accelerate delivery for our ocean.

Session 2: Interactive discussion with Pacific Ocean Commissioner and the 2050 Strategy

Background: The Vision of the FPO is "*A secure future for Pacific Island Countries and Territories based on sustainable development, management and conservation of our Ocean*". This Vision remains as relevant today as when it was produced in the FPO in 2010. However, much has happened in the intervening period from 2010 to now, including, the agreement and passing of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (2011 – 2020), the approval of the 17 SDGs including SDG 14 on "life under water", the UN Oceans Conference of 2017, the PIF communique outlining the Blue Pacific narrative, formal negotiations on a Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction global instrument and formal inclusion of oceans into the UNFCCC Cop schedule. Although, stark facts have emerged that demonstrate progress towards sustainable oceans is at risk, such as 2019 being at record or near-record levels for ocean temperature since records began, and estimates that ocean plastic will weigh more than fish by 2050.

To update us on progress of FPO and regional ocean governance, we are fortunate to have the recent Blue Pacific Ocean 2021 Report (BPOR). Indeed, this is a "first attempt" at the regional level to compile a comprehensive, multi-facetted, cross-cutting and holistic review and stock-take of the state of affairs of ocean governance in the region. The BPOR undertook a participatory stock-take exercise to assess progress in ocean. Overall, BPOR reports "moderate positive change progress" on the implementation of existing regional ocean policies and commitments. Key governance issues raised by the BPOR, include the need for; (i) a common Vision which inculcates a broad stakeholder constituency, (ii) adaptive and flexible approaches to challenges, and (iii) strengthening connectivity amongst the different sectoral policies to enhance recognition and ownership of FPO.

The BPOR notably homes in on some key challenges which emerged from the stock-take. Whilst recognizing the plethora of policies in the region, it points out that implementation and delivery on these policies is, in many instances, weak. Allied to this is the maintenance of siloed institutional arrangements and practices which are not synergistic with the holistic nature of the Pacific-perception of the Ocean, the FPO or the "indivisible" nature of the SDGs as outlined in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The BPOR looks towards more informed decisions based on collective stewardship of the Ocean. However, that requires systematic reporting process to be put in place within the decision-making architecture of the region in order for PIF Members to be provided with a comprehensive overview of the all the work undertaken on the ocean, at all levels and across the different sectors. The report concludes that efforts in the region have to date not been adequate to reverse the degradation facing the ocean.

Starting in 2021, we will be guided by a new 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent in order to protect people, place and prospects of the Blue Pacific. It is envisaged that this new strategy will reinforce ocean and climate change considerations into all regional and national policies and plans, both public and private.

The Pacific 2050 Strategy should reformulate and strengthen the resolve to deliver the FPO, and permit a trajectory to a less-siloed and more integrated approach to oceans. Such a strategic direction is vital for a blue recovery from COVID-19, but ensuring the triple-bottom-line of sustainability (social, economic and
environmental) as well as informed decision-making to manage inevitable trade-offs will be imperative. This POA meeting is at a juncture where an accelerated trajectory for sustainable development of our ocean has never been so vital.

Approach/Modality: Session 2 is formed form two parts. Firstly, an interactive discussion with the Pacific Ocean Commissioner on improved coordination and acceleration action on oceans. This discussion will be informed by the previous Session, as well as the various briefing documents which are supporting this POA meeting. Secondly, a presentation will be made on advancement on the 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific Continent. Delegates may find it useful to have read supporting documents and be prepared with their own questions.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Increased awareness of the contemporary challenges in coordination and progress in oceans and ways in which collaborative progress can be accelerated in delivering FPO and other regional commitments.
- Understand more about the Pacific 2050 Strategy and how this can be used to accelerate ocean progress.

References:

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent
https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/

Listing of all Ocean Policy Frameworks at the National, Regional & Global level for the Pacific
https://opocbluepacific.org/ocean-policies-political-statements/

Blue Pacific Ocean Report 2021
https://opocbluepacific.org/publications/#blue-pacific-ocean-report

SPC Pacific Data Hub SDG Pacific Wheels
https://pacificdata.org/dashboard/sdg-14-life-below-water

SPREP Coastal and Marine Indicator
https://soec.sprep.org/report_online.html#coastal-and-marine