



Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment

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To: Our Valued Partners

Subject: Public Release and Transmittal of the Palau Sustainable Ocean Policy 2026

Alii and Greetings,

As a large ocean state, Palau's identity, cultural heritage, food security, and economic resilience are fundamentally and permanently intertwined with the health of our marine environment. From our ancestral traditional management practices to contemporary governance systems, our people have always risen to the call of ocean stewardship. Today, it is my distinct honor and privilege to publicly release the Palau Sustainable Ocean Policy 2026.

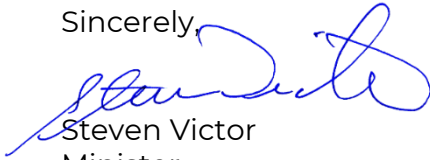
This ambitious policy establishes an overarching, high-level strategic framework designed to guide, align, and coordinate the management of 100% of our ocean space across both nearshore and offshore marine environments. Grounded firmly in our traditional values and informed by lessons emerging out of our modern ocean governance systems, the policy introduces seven critical pillars that encompass marine biodiversity, people and livelihoods, a sustainable blue economy, and maritime security. These strategic objectives will be translated into concrete, coordinated national actions over the next ten years through the forthcoming Sustainable Ocean Plan (SOP).

The successful formulation of this policy was a deeply collaborative journey that would not have been possible without the shared insights and dedication of our local partners and ocean practitioners. I would like to express my profound gratitude to our local partners who have participated in meaningful consultations and provided the vital feedback that anchored this approach.

Furthermore, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to our development partners, including the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) for their generous funding, and the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy for providing the essential technical guidance in the formulation of our policy framework.

Moving forward, transitioning this policy from paper to practice requires the active, coordinated support of every single citizen and partner. I call upon all of you to join the Ministry in realizing the profound ocean vision that serves as the heartbeat of this document: "Protecting Our Ocean, Providing for Our People." By standing together as united stewards of our paradise, we will ensure that our rich marine inheritance continues to sustain and prosper Palau's communities for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Steven Victor

Minister

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment



Palau Sustainable Ocean Policy

Protecting Our Ocean,
Providing for Our People



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Acknowledgement

This Policy is the result of a collaborative journey made possible by the generous funding and partnership of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). We are deeply grateful to the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy for providing the vital technical guidance that anchored our approach. Most importantly, we acknowledge our local stakeholders, whose shared insights and commitment ensure that this policy remains a true covenant for Palau's communities and future generations.



HIGH LEVEL PANEL for
**A SUSTAINABLE
OCEAN ECONOMY**

Cultural Prologue

A Debed ma Rechad ma Ungil Kerruul

Beluu a ngeltengat ra rebladk ma rucheil el ngarbab

Ungil a debel, l'obdois el chad, lolchau a ilteet el keruul el mera beluu.

A chutem ma mesei a delad leng uchul a teloched e oltekau a beluu ma delengchokl

Me di lungil me di lungil me di lungil aikal beluu,

Me di dungil me di dungil me di dungil el bek lechad

Composed by: Bilung Gloria Salii for OUR OCEAN Conference 2022

Rising from the footsteps of those who came before, this chant honors the deep, reciprocal bond between Palauans and our natural world. It weaves together the wealth of the ocean and the nourishment of the earth as a singular, life-giving inheritance. Ultimately, it serves as a visionary prayer, charting a course toward a future where our people and our paradise prosper in harmony.



Presidential Foreword

Palau's ocean lies at the heart of our identity, culture, livelihoods, and future. For generations, our people have managed the sea through traditional practices such as the bul — an adaptive management system — closing areas to allow life to recover before reopening them for shared benefit. As a big ocean state, we have carried this stewardship forward, from early conservation measures to the Palau National Marine Sanctuary and now our Marine Spatial Planning process, where we use science and traditional wisdom to guide us as we manage 100% of our ocean space.

The Palau Sustainable Ocean Policy sets a shared national vision for a healthy, resilient, and productive ocean that continues to support our people, communities, biodiversity, and economy in the face of growing environmental and climate pressures. Through this Policy, Palau reaffirms its commitment to integrated ocean governance that manages our entire ocean, protects our marine ecosystems, supports sustainable livelihoods, and strengthens national resilience for current and future generations. Achieving this vision will require coordinated action across government, communities, traditional and elected leaders, the private sector, and our development partners, working together toward a healthy, resilient, and prosperous ocean future.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.'.

Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau

Why a Sustainable Ocean Policy?

Increasing need to protect our ocean and provide for our people

Palau's ocean is central to the nation's identity, culture, economy and way of life. It provides food security, livelihoods, transportation, tourism opportunities and ecosystem services that support the wellbeing of communities across the country. As a large ocean state, Palau's future is intrinsically linked to the health and resilience of its marine environment.

However, Palau's ocean is facing increasing pressures from climate change, marine pollution, unsustainable resource use and growing demands on marine and coastal ecosystems. Rising sea levels, ocean warming, coral bleaching, stronger storms and changing marine ecosystems threaten biodiversity, fisheries, infrastructure, communities and economic resilience. These pressures also pose risks to food security, traditional practices and the long-term sustainability of ocean-based industries.

Palau has long recognised the importance of protecting and sustainably managing its ocean resources, with ocean stewardship embedded in Palauan culture and way of life, and has demonstrated this through an extensive Protected Area Network and an ongoing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) process that seeks to balance prosperity with protection.

The Sustainable Ocean Policy covers the full range of ocean sectors and uses across both nearshore and offshore marine environments, including fisheries, biodiversity conservation, tourism, maritime transport, and sustainable economic development. It promotes a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to improve cross-sector coordination, evidence-based decision-making and collaboration among government, states, communities, traditional leaders and partners.



A coordinated approach

The Policy functions as an overarching high-level strategic document to guide and coordinate ocean management that provides mechanisms to support policy coherence, sectoral alignment, partnership linkages and national dialogue on ocean priorities.

It unifies Palau's ocean initiatives, commitments and management approaches within one framework, setting a clear direction for conservation, sustainable use and stewardship.

Palau has also demonstrated global leadership in sustainable ocean management through its commitments under the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy and its longstanding commitment to marine conservation and stewardship. The Policy also meets a commitment under the Global High Level Panel.



HIGH LEVEL PANEL for
**A SUSTAINABLE
OCEAN ECONOMY**

Regional and Global Frameworks

The Policy also aligns with key Pacific regional and international frameworks, including the:

- 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent;
- Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape;
- Sustainable Development Goals;
- Paris Agreement; and
- Convention on Biological Diversity, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Through this Policy, Palau reaffirms its commitment to regional cooperation and global leadership in sustainable ocean stewardship.



The Sustainable Ocean Policy

A shared vision

Our ocean vision recognises that the long-term health of Palau's ocean is inseparable from the wellbeing, resilience and prosperity of its people. It reflects Palau's commitment to balancing ocean protection with sustainable development, ensuring marine resources continue to support communities, culture, livelihoods and future generation.

Protecting Our Ocean,
Providing for Our People



The Framework

This Policy is supported by a framework comprising seven pillars including four technical pillars and three implementation pillars capturing key themes, projects and stakeholders relevant to Palau's ocean management. Traditional values, identity and knowledge underpin the entire framework and are foundational to achieving the vision.

The Framework was developed in consultation with MAFE and key stakeholders and was guided by the UN Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans, A Practitioner's Guide. The pillars were developed to address Palau's specific ocean management priorities and can be mapped to the Ocean Transformations identified in the Handbook.

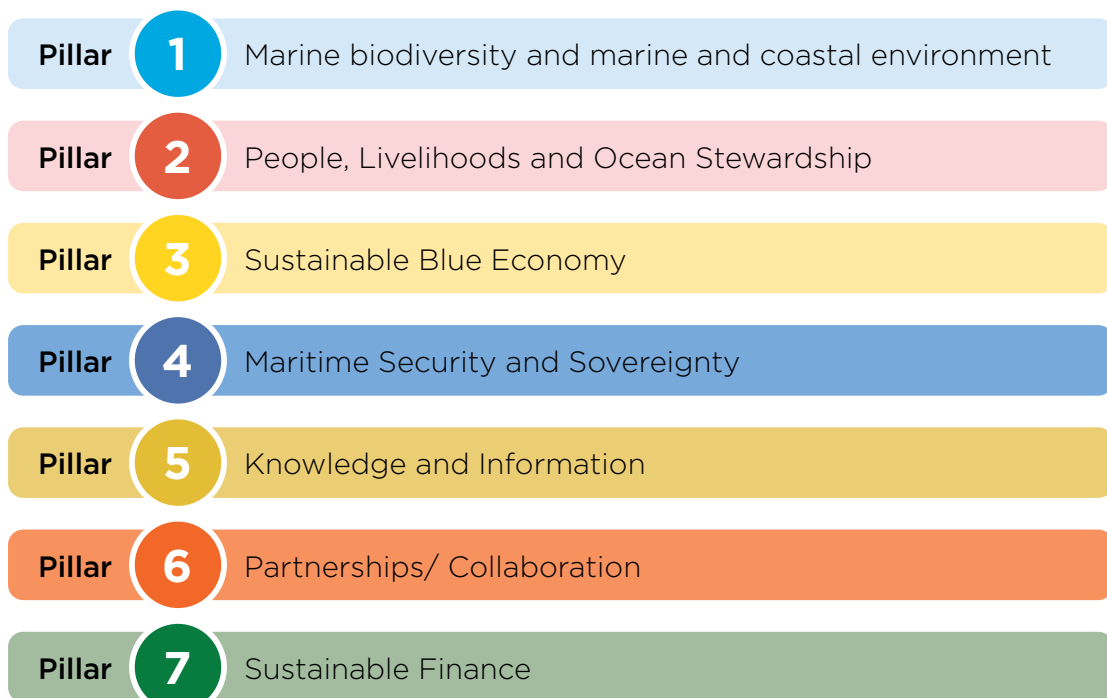
Guiding principles and values

This Policy is guided by the following key principles:

- **Inclusive and participatory** – ensuring meaningful engagement of stakeholders across all ocean sectors
- **Knowledge-based** – informed by the latest science, monitoring, traditional knowledge and evidence-based decision making
- **Aligned and coordinated** – supporting consistency with existing national, regional and international policy frameworks.

Policy Pillars

The seven pillars of the framework provide a structure that will help guide ocean management and are detailed below.



Sustainable Ocean Policy Framework

Protect our ocean, provide for our people

Traditional values, identify and systems

1. Marine biodiversity and marine and coastal environment

Marine and coastal environment are effectively managed to safeguard biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and support healthy oceans that sustain communities, livelihoods, and future generations.

2. People, Livelihoods and Ocean Stewardship

Resilient communities in Palau sustain livelihoods, food security, and cultural identity through ecosystem stewardship, responsible management of nearshore resources, and the transfer of traditional knowledge and evolving customs to future generations.

3. Sustainable Blue Economy

A sustainable blue economy that sustains ocean-based livelihoods and food security while protecting marine ecosystems and ensuring lasting benefits for Palau's communities and future generations.

4. Maritime Security and Sovereignty

A safe and secure ocean, where national and international laws and best practices are respected and followed and negative practices such as IUU fishing, bycatch, overfishing, trafficking, and marine debris are minimised

Implementation

5. Knowledge & Information

6. Partnerships/ Collaboration

7. Sustainable Finance

Goals

Each of the four technical pillars has a defined goal informed through extensive stakeholder engagement.

PILLAR	GOAL
Marine biodiversity and marine and coastal environment	Marine and coastal environment are effectively managed to safeguard biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and support healthy ocean that sustain communities, livelihoods, and future generations.
People, Livelihoods and Ocean Stewardship	Resilient communities in Palau sustain livelihoods, food security, and cultural identity through ecosystem stewardship, responsible management of nearshore resources and the transfer of traditional knowledge and evolving customs to future generations.
Sustainable Blue Economy	A sustainable blue economy that sustains ocean-based livelihoods and food security while protecting marine ecosystems and ensuring lasting benefits for Palau's communities and future generations.
Maritime Security and Sovereignty	A safe and secure ocean, where national and international laws and best practices are respected and followed and negative practices such as IUU fishing, bycatch, overfishing, trafficking and marine debris are minimised.



Priority Action Areas

The technical pillars contain Priority action areas identified through extensive stakeholder consultation and existing priorities contained in Palau's legislation and policies. These priority actions reflect the most urgent priorities for implementation.

As well as technical priority actions, there are cross cutting priorities that sit across all pillars.

PILLAR	PRIORITY ACTION AREA
Marine biodiversity and marine and coastal environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen management and effectiveness of the marine and coastal environment• Reduce and manage impacts from WQ/ sedimentation/ pollution• Strengthen community based conservation initiatives (CBCI) of protected areas and outside protected areas• Expand protected areas and community-based conservation initiatives• Invasive species management control• Climate Change Adaptation and management• Protection of mangrove habitats for ecosystem services and potential carbon markets• Protect endangered species and their habitats• Improve catchment/ water shed/ forest management (Ridge to Reef Management)

People, Livelihoods and Ocean Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen the resilience of communities to climate change and disasters• Promote resilient food production systems and supporting local producers• Invasive species management• Locally led marine eco tourism to support livelihoods• Local jobs and income generated from ocean-based activities and industries• Development of small scale aquaculture for livelihoods• Nurture and sustain local stewardship of Palau's marine environment• Expand artisanal fishing for livelihoods• Strengthen relationships and interaction among coastal communities and ocean stakeholders
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Priority Action Areas

PILLAR	PRIORITY ACTION AREA
Sustainable Blue Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote resilient food production systems and supporting local producers• Understanding Climate change impacts on blue economy sectors• Protection of Coastal marine habitats (mangroves) for ecosystem services• Blue Carbon Feasibility Assessment• Palauan owned commercial fishing port is created• Blue Economy Strategy• Establish a fishery management framework for Palau's fisheries• Food security supported through sustainable and regular tuna supply available for all Palauans and the tourist industry• Develop aquaculture as a pillar of blue economy• Support sustainable tourism development and implement tourism strategy• Progress sustainable shipping initiative• Cables as essential infrastructure. Integrate cable infrastructure into marine spatial planning• Advance marine renewable energy• Potential oil and gas exploration
Maritime Security and Sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalising maritime boundaries baseline• Review and update legislation related to maritime boundaries, marine resources, and ocean governance to ensure alignment with international law• Strengthen monitoring and inspection of vessels entering Palau ports to prevent illegal fishing, pollution and maritime crime• Enhance collaboration with regional partners to strengthen maritime security, monitoring and enforcement• Foster social and economic growth through stronger local participation in a safe, efficient, and sustainable maritime transport sector• Emerging and innovative technologies• More effective monitoring, control and surveillance of Palau's ocean• Near shore policing and public safety• Resourcing/ Capacity/ Vessels• Develop sub-committee under Coordinating Maritime Management Working Group

Priority Action Areas

PILLAR	PRIORITY ACTION AREA
Cross Cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture and sustain local stewardship of Palau's Marine Environment and Protected Areas • Investment in awareness, education and training (Across pillars - Sustainable Ocean) • Strengthen state-level policies, regulations, and frameworks that enable SOP implementation • Build management and enforcement capacity, including training staff in governance, monitoring, and community engagement • The involvement of women and other marginalised individuals, groups, and communities in the ocean economy • Dedicated national ocean coordinating committee and resourcing • Capacity and capability building (and programs) • Intergenerational knowledge exchange • Strengthen compliance and enforcement • Promote equitable access, rights and ownership of ocean resources and services. • Strengthen the connection between the ocean and human health, including physical and mental health and wellbeing • Support education, knowledge sharing, skills development to strengthen sustainable ocean stewardship • Strengthen cultural identity and sense of place by supporting community connections, traditions and stewardship associated with the ocean. • Strengthen and preserve traditional place-based knowledge of ecosystems, values and practices held by coastal communities over generations



Implementation - The Sustainable Ocean Plan

Implementation of this Policy will occur through the development of Palau's Sustainable Ocean **Plan (SOP)**, which will translate Policy objectives into coordinated actions and set out the priorities, arrangements and mechanisms needed to support long-term ocean sustainability, resilience and prosperity. This will include developing targets for cross cutting priority actions that will strengthen the enabling environment to achieve existing policy and national targets.

Additional strategies to implement priority actions include:

- Strengthening governance arrangements
- Alignment of existing policies and plans
- Cross sectoral coordination
- Capacity Building for Partners
- Supporting legal frameworks
- Strengthening National and State co-management
- National dialogues
- Ocean coordination committees
- Partnerships and investment priorities
- Supporting systems and processes; and
- A monitoring framework.

By aligning policies, institutions and development priorities, the SOP will help reduce duplication, clarify roles and responsibilities, and support more effective and integrated ocean governance. Ultimately, the SOP is intended to support practical implementation and informed decision-making to ensure Palau's ocean continues to provide environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits for present and future generations.

The SOP will also provide a mechanism to address and incorporate emerging issues including; Seabed mining, BBNJ, and Climate Change.

Timeline

The SOP will initially span ten years, with a mid-term review at 5 years. MAFE will be responsible for facilitating this review to ensure it continues to reflect emerging priorities, stakeholder feedback and changing environmental, social and economic conditions.



Protecting Our Ocean, Providing for Our People

