



OPOC

**OFFICE OF THE PACIFIC
OCEAN COMMISSIONER**

Address: Ratu Sukuna Rd, Suva
Email: opoc@forumsec.org
Phone: + 679 3312600

Brief for Main Talanoa 3: Opportunities to Address the Limitations and Challenges of Ocean Policy and Governance

Prepared by: Prof. Jeremy Hills

Introduction:

The Talanoa has so far considered Ocean issues, policies and actors in Talanoa session 1 and challenges and limitations in Talanoa session 2. Earlier sessions have recognized the multiple levels of policy, including national regional and international, which direct Ocean action. The OPOC Blue Pacific Ocean Report of 2021 outlines key Ocean issues and the associated policy nexus. Session 2 specifically identified contemporary challenges for the ocean especially cross-sectoral and regional governance integration and alignment and adequacy of financial resourcing. In session 3, the Talanoa focus now moves onto the way forward and focuses on opportunities and priority areas for future action.

This session 3 brief outlines a selected number of areas with opportunities for progressing ocean governance and action. The approach transcends the business-as-usual project-by-project thinking and considers systematic cross-cutting themes and opportunities. Moving forward, and appreciating the challenges recognized during Talanoa 2, consolidated action around key priorities which recognize the diversity of stakeholders and roles will be necessary. This session aims to direct reflection towards thematic areas with key opportunities for further discussion.

Opportunities in financing

Globally, the Ocean receives a tiny slice of finance, with SDG14 being the least funded of all SDGs receiving about 1% of SDG Official Development Assistance (ODA, 2019¹). With ongoing budget pressures across the North and the South, it is inconceivable that development finance will expand to fulfil regional needs within the 2030 timeline; reliance on traditional models of development assistance will not match regional aspirations. Although pursuing expansion of ODA and other international development assistance is necessary, additional strengthening and diversification of financing will be required across many levels. At the national level, this could include enhanced strengthening of Public Financial Management (PFM) including the budget cycle, and fiscal policies, to align government financing more clearly to delivery of the visions as set out in NOPs and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Furthermore, efforts to catalyze enterprise and innovation and support private sector finance need to be advanced to promote action in sustainable Ocean development. Further

¹ P Scotland, 'Why we need to tackle the ocean funding crisis' (Economist Impact, 24 February 2022) available at <https://ocean.economist.com/blue-finance/articles/why-we-need-to-tackle-the-ocean-funding-crisis> .

recognition of feasible areas to commodify the Ocean in a sustainable and equitable way need to be considered, such as blue carbon. Innovative instruments could include leverage of debt through the creation of sovereign “blue” bonds, in specific circumstances, which offer up-front financing but must be used in a strategic way where there is a high cost of inaction and which do not create long-term inflexibility and burdens on government. Progressing ocean financing must further mainstream the Ocean, coordinate multiple finance flows through strategic portfolio management, and be supported by advancements in institutional absorption and readiness; this must be coordinated, for example by increasing collaboration between Ministries of Finance / Economic and Ocean-related key line ministries at the national level.

Opportunities in policy

While the region is furnished by rich layers of policy at the international, regional and national level, this has not translated in comprehensive action when the lack of progress in delivery SDG14 targets in the region is reviewed. As mentioned in prior sessions, the need for enhanced coordination mechanisms is a priority in policy delivery. Promulgation of NOPS has been seen as a positive move for countries, yet to what extent they provide new ways forward, or repeat existing policy agendas remains unproven². There often appears to be a lack of clarity on the differential on the role between regional and national policies and what areas should regional policy focus on which are obligatory regional (such as, interregional connectivity in marine transport, or BBNJ). Further clarity in regional synergies may help further rationalize priorities in regional policy and support international partners who focus on Regional Cooperation and Integration, such as ADB. Maybe, after over 20 years the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape could be reviewed and updated to meet contemporary opportunities in regional Ocean governance and provide clearing landing points for international finance.

Opportunities in the knowledge ecosystem

The vastness and complexity of the ocean means that our understanding is limited and imperfect. Even with massive advancement in science and technology this state will largely persist and undermine evidence-based management. With financial limitations, then a further focus would need to be made on what information or data is required to advance ocean governance, and the who and how this will be collected. Clearly, information collection and scientific research will be limited, and thus there is a need to prioritize information collection endeavors at a national and regional level. Broadening out the Ocean knowledge system to further embed indigenous / traditional knowledge would offer opportunities to further rationalize data collection. Although it is recognized that traditional knowledge has a role within Ocean governance, rational use of this is in shaping policy and action tends to be *ad hoc*. Further elucidation of the knowledge – policy interface and understanding how knowledge influences policy-based decision making could further refine knowledge collections needs and strengthen the move towards overt evidence-based management and governance.

Opportunities in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Progress monitoring of the regional Ocean has recently been delivered through the Blue Pacific Ocean Report of 2021. However, reporting on SDG14 progress at the national level is still very limited in terms of SDG14 Targets and adequacy of information. Further national level

² Hills, J.M., Lajaunie, C., Maharaj, P. & Mazzega, P. (2021) Orchestrating the Ocean using a National ocean Policy: the case of the Solomon Islands. *Frontiers in Marine Science*: doi: 10.3389/fmars.2021.676944

reporting tends to be constrained, even though NOPs often have monitoring and evaluation provisions. Enhanced M&E is required to refine and optimize delivery for the Ocean; this needs to coherently span national and regional Ocean policy. Strengthening M&E would have numerous benefits, including improving institutional cooperation and providing coherent information with which to refine and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Ocean interventions. However, M&E would need to look beyond delivery and impact and include an assessment of value-for-money. Linking of the indicators of progress to costs would allow for the first time critical appraisal of different approaches to Ocean governance and emerge opportunities for more cost-effective delivery. This process can form a robust basis and justification for additional international finance requests, where cost efficiency and effectiveness can be guaranteed to donors. Further cooperation with Supreme Audit Authorities, and other relevant institutions, would allow performance-related strategic reviews to take place, and help to answer questions about delivery modalities (such as the balance between government-led and CROP-led delivery), intervention selection (such as identifying which approaches provide cost effective impact) and regional synergies (such as identifying interventions which catalyze the most regional benefits).

Opportunities in capacity building

Building capacity and strengthening institutions is a central requirement for the region. While capacity efforts have been undertaken for decades, through organizations such as USP and SPC, a capacity gap still remains in the region with regards the Ocean. Capacity building which is piecemeal and fragmented has proven not to be effective. This maybe perpetuates an over-reliance on external expertise and technological-know-how. While the region probably produces adequate numbers of marine studies, and associated discipline, graduates at the Higher Education level, the subsequent loss of such graduates from the region and or profession consistently undermines capacity. There is a need for a more systematic approach to regional capacity and building professional career pathways, such as through registration of professionals, progressive Continual Professional Development and lifelong learning pathways, which establish a coherent professional cadre within the region (and as initiated by EU PEUMP project). Further efforts are needed to ensure inclusivity, with female marine graduates slightly outnumbering males, but rapidly dropping out the workforce (in Fiji³); although the overall picture is not fully clear due to lack of gender disaggregated reporting. Ultimately the goal of inclusivity does not concern simply the “advancement” of women, but rather the inclusion of affected stakeholders in management decisions to stimulate effective, sustainable resource management for all. Building systematic capacity and using pro-active interventions to retain women in the marine workforce are opportunities for strengthening Ocean governance.

Discussion points

This section provides some possible discussion areas on opportunities in Oceans. At this juncture we have a less obscure view of the Ocean at a regional scale than during the preparatory work leading up to the First UN Oceans Conference in 2017. For example, the OPOC BPOR report of 2021 provides a detailed regional assessment, the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific provides a guiding development trajectory for the region, and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement of 2021 recognizes operational priorities to “*protect our*

³ Michalena, E., Straza, T.R.A, Singh, P., Morris, C.W. & Hills, J.M. (2020) Promoting sustainable and inclusive oceans management in Pacific islands through women and science. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 150:110711.

people, place and prospects and secure the future of our Blue Pacific Continent". Thus, now is an appropriate time to look beyond the fragmented, sectoral and project -based business-as-usual thinking and move to a more systematic contemporary paradigm which leverages the range of opportunities we have.

Questions informing the discussion could include:

1. How can the portfolio of Ocean finance be expanded most effectively at the national and regional level – and which stakeholders need to be involved?
2. What do we need to do to more clearly differentiate the priorities of regional and of national Ocean policy and governance – how can this be coordinated?
3. How can we more systemically include a broader array of knowledge systems in ocean governance, and secure and institutionalize such processes?
4. How can we strengthen M&E processes so that we have evidence at the national and regional level to be sure we are delivering the most impact for the least money?