

Concept paper - 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, November 2013, Fiji

1. Overview

The Pacific Islands region, as defined by the island nations and territories of SPREP, covers 90 million sq km and is ecologically one of the richest on earth, with habitats ranging from mountain forest ecosystems to volcanic islands and low lying coral atolls. Amazingly, land makes up less than 1 percent of this region¹.

The huge expanse of ocean supports the most extensive and diverse coral reefs in the world, the largest tuna fishery, the deepest oceanic trenches and the healthiest and in some cases, largest remaining populations of many globally rare and threatened species including whales, sea turtles, dugongs and saltwater crocodiles.

The Pacific is home to a high proportion of endemic and threatened flora and fauna - some of the highest percentages of endemic species per capita in the world can be found in this region². However, Pacific Island biodiversity is under intense pressure from natural and human-induced disturbance, alien species introductions, population growth and other threats. Its flora and fauna are among the most highly threatened in the world. Furthermore, the small size and isolated nature of our islands makes them extremely vulnerable to these threats. Many of these endemic and threatened species are of material resource or spiritual and cultural significance to Pacific people.

2. About the Nature Conservation Conference

Nature conservation programs in the Pacific Island Countries are guided by this regional conservation Conference that has met every 4-5 years since 1975. It has become the principal gathering of government agencies, NGOs, community-based organisations, donor agencies and individual experts concerned with conservation science and practice in the Pacific Islands region. It is an opportunity to set a Pacific based and initiated agenda for Pacific conservation for the next five years.

Each Conference has generated an Action Strategy as a guiding framework for the next 4-5 years. The subsequent Conference has reviewed progress achieved against the Strategy before considering outstanding issues and priorities for the years ahead.

The Action Strategy for Nature Conservation is the key over-arching or crosscutting strategy for biodiversity conservation in the Pacific Islands Region. The current strategy, 2008 - 2012, is a product of the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas at Alotau, Papua New Guinea in October 2007. The current Action Strategy has taken the lessons articulated in the review of the 2003 – 2007 Action Strategy including the outcomes of the 8th Conference to formulate a new approach which is centred on 8 core principles for nature conservation in the Pacific. It is basically a code of conduct to guide the work of all those involved in nature conservation in the Pacific. It is important to note that the Action Strategy is significant because it provides a regional framework for conservation that guides Pacific island countries

¹ Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

² Ecosystem Profile: Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot – May 2007 - http://www.sprep.org/attachments/PacificRegion_47.pdf

and territories, donors, NGOs and regional organizations. It also provides an additional resource lever and it is a document which Governments, NGOs, donors and regional organisations can commit themselves to implementing.

Since the 8th Conference in 2007, many accomplishments have been achieved in the Pacific such as the Micronesian Challenge, the Phoenix Island Protected Area which is the largest marine protected area in the world, the expansion of the Locally Marine Managed Areas, the political support and commitment from Pacific Forum Leaders to the Pacific Oceanscape Framework, and many other key accomplishments that have been widely recognized.

3. 9th Conference Theme: Natural Solutions: Building Resilience for a Changing Pacific

Momentum has been gathering around the world to find natural solutions to the issues and impacts of climate change. Ecosystem services have become increasingly recognised as a fundamental approach to combat these threats to the Pacific environment and its communities. Climate change is predicted to have a range of impacts on island ecosystems and natural resources that are critical to current and future development, some of these are anticipated to be severe. It is increasingly recognised that a relevant response to these predicted impacts is the application of ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) approaches. That is, the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy to the adverse effects of climate change.

By taking into account the ecosystem services on which people depend for their livelihoods and social and economic security, EbA integrates sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in a comprehensive adaptation strategy (CBD 2009)³. Nature conservation and its relationship to sustainable development, blue/green economies and community resilience is a key element in EbA approaches.

It is proposed that the 9th Pacific Conference be organised within the framework of promoting natural solutions to the threats of climate change while developing community resilience through sustainable development of natural and physical resources.

4. Key Objectives of the 9th Conference

i. Review the Action Strategy 2008-2012 and formulate a new Action Strategy for 2013-2017

- Assess progress in implementing the Principles of the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in the Pacific Islands Region 2008-2012.
- Discuss and agree on priorities for the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation for 2013 – 2017, taking into account the potential to strengthen its relationship to implementation of EbA to climate change in the region, and also for helping countries to meet the Aichi Targets⁴.

³ CBD [Convention on Biological Diversity] 2009. *Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Report of the Second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change*. Technical Series No. 41.

⁴ Aichi Targets are overarching international framework guiding the conservation of biodiversity. These targets were set under the Convention on Biological Diversity creating an updated Strategic Plan for Biodiversity at a global meeting in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan 2010. For more information see <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

- Identify and agree on specific key priority issues for the next 5-year period including innovative, practical and cost effective ways to address these issues.
- Identify and agree on specific action to promote and implement natural solutions to climate change adaptation.

ii. Promote natural solutions to address impacts of climate change

- Review status of current ecosystem-based initiatives for climate change adaptation in the Pacific.
- Identify how such initiatives can be strengthened and more effectively applied as adaptation solutions to impacts of climate change.

iii. Review National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

- Assess progress in the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans;
- Identify priority areas to be considered in the NBSAP review process; and
- Provide a synthesis of the new priority targets for NBSAPs which will provide guidance and input to the setting of targets and priorities for the new Action Strategy for Nature Conservation

iv. CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) and Island Biodiversity Programme of Work (IBPow)

- Assess progress in the implementation of the CBD PoWPA and IBPow
- Discuss and agree on ways to improve the implementation of these CBD programmes of work as a means for countries to meet the Aichi Targets.

v. Capacity Building, Knowledge Management and Learning

- Identify capacity needs and opportunities to advance conservation efforts in the Pacific;
- Identify and develop mechanisms to deliver capacity development initiatives such as the South-South Cooperation modality

5. Expected Outputs

- Implementation mechanisms identified for strengthening the development and application of natural solutions to climate change adaptation.
- Case studies developed and shared on selected topics especially those on ecosystem based adaptation.
- Recommendations to assist countries with the review of their NBSAPs.
- Draft Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific produced to guide conservation work for the next five years.
- Support mechanisms and partnership arrangements developed to assist countries achieve the Aichi Targets, national and regional targets.
- Mechanisms and options identified to implement Capacity Development Programmes for Nature Conservation in the Pacific.
- New alliances and partnership forged to deliver on the Principles of the Action Strategy.

6. Conference Approach

The approach and modality envisaged for the 9th Conference is one that promotes the sharing of knowledge, ideas, experiences, best practices and lessons learnt with a view that these will enhance and further strengthen conservation efforts in the Pacific. The conference will be delivered using a mix of plenary and break-out group discussions, panel discussions, interactive media displays and exhibitions, mini workshops and knowledge cafes types of events.

A one day Ministerial meeting is proposed as a way to engage political leaders in setting a new course for nature conservation in the Pacific and to launch new commitments and conservation initiatives. A one day donor round table dialogue meeting is also planned to discuss financing mechanisms, opportunities and options for sustainable funding for nature conservation in the Pacific.

7. Target Audience

Participants to the 9th conference are expected from a broad range of stakeholders which include Pacific Island Countries and Territories, local, regional and International NGOs, Youths and Community Groups, regional and international organizations and development partners.

8. Conference Organizers

SPREP is the lead organization responsible for the 9th Conference working closely with the Pacific Islands Round Table for Nature Conservation, the host country Fiji and key partners.

9. Funding and Partnership

The conference relies on financial contributions and funding grants from donors and development partners to support the participation of government and communities as well as contributing to the overall costs of the conference. An estimated funding package of US\$500,000.00 is to be raised for the conference. The host country Fiji will provide in-kind support to the conference which includes costs for the venue and for coordinating logistics for the conference.

SPREP also welcomes technical support from partners including volunteers and interns who are willing to commit themselves to this very important event for the Pacific.

10. Contacts on the Conference

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