

DIRECTOR, THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAMME (SPREP), MR. DAVID SHEPPARD

Opening Remarks, Pacific's Environment Forum

Hon. Minister for Natural Resources and Environment, Hon Ministers and delegates to the SPREP Meeting, Representative of the Executive Director of UNEP, members of the Diplomatic Corps of Samoa, Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning and Talofa.

Welcome to the first SPREP Environment Forum – we hope you have had a good trip here, that you are refreshed and ready for a busy week. We can guarantee it will be busy.

The Pacific Environment Forum is a new initiative.

Our aim is to provide an increased focus within the SPREP meeting for discussion of key technical issues which affect our region. Suggestion from last year's SPREP meeting, where Ministerial Forum was very successful, we hope the Forum will become a regular feature of future SPREP meetings.

We have had a team working tirelessly on planning for this Forum and I would like to particularly thank Andrew Kennedy and Easter Galuvao for their efforts.

My broad instructions to the organising team were to make it relevant, make it interesting and fun and ensure the Forum is as interactive as possible. I'm sure all of these aims will be met. Whether the Forum is interactive will rest with you – the audience – and I urge you all to be involved, today.

The Forum is structured around three panels in the morning and break out groups in the afternoon – there will be many opportunities for you to be involved. The panels will cover three key areas:

- The Green Economy
- Environmental Governance and
- Adapting to Climate Change

We hope this Forum will provide a useful input to the Rio+20 Meeting next year. Also that it will complement and build on a major meeting of Environment and Finance Ministers held in Apia in July this year – which helped develop a Pacific position for Rio+20.

Next years' meeting covers 20 years after the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. I worked at SPREP at that time and can attest to the focus and energy of Pacific Countries, supported by SPREP at this landmark conference. SPREP in fact had a 2 person team, led by Gerald Miles.

The original Rio Conference was a landmark event which developed a number of key conventions including the biodiversity and climate conventions and set ambitious targets for managing and protecting the environment.

20 years down the track we can see there has been major progress in the Pacific on areas such as mainstreaming environmental issues into development sectors and on the Green Economy, Samoa MNRE for example. However, major challenges remain.

The loss of biodiversity globally, and in our region, countries at alarming rates.

Climate Change has been identified by Pacific leaders as the biggest challenge facing our region and requires urgent action. We will hear more about these threats and challenges today. We will also hear about positive examples.

The Pacific Oceanscape, for example, provides an innovative example of oceans management in this region, and for the world.

Delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the aim of today's forum is to have an interactive session. So please get involved and share your experience.

I wish you an enjoyable and productive forum.

Thank you, Fa'a fetai.