

BACKGROUND PAPER ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR PACIFIC REGIONALISM

BACKGROUND

The Pacific Plan Review

1. The 2013 Review of the Pacific Plan recommended the Pacific Plan be re-cast into a more concise and manageable document to be referred to as the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The aim of the framework is to provide the Pacific Leaders' vision, based on shared regional values, with clear strategic direction for the region, through key priorities, working closer together and creating pathways for deeper cooperation and integration.
2. The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Special Retreat on the Pacific Plan Review was convened in the Cook Islands on 5 May 2014. The key aspects of the Forum Outcomes document are as follows:
 - a) **Agreed** that the Pacific Plan is a framework specifically for advancing Pacific regionalism, not a regional development nor a funding plan.
 - b) **Endorsed** the re-casting of the Plan as the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.
 - c) **Agreed** that the Pacific Plan Action Committee be replaced and re-established as a smaller, specialist Sub-Committee of the FOC.
 - d) **Tasked** the Forum Secretariat to present the Framework for Pacific Regionalism for Leaders' further consideration and final approval at the 45th Pacific Islands Forum to be held in Palau from 29 July to 1 August 2014.
 - e) **Tasked** the Forum Secretariat to consult with CROP agencies and other stakeholders and develop terms of reference for an analysis of governance and financing options for collective action in pursuit of Pacific regionalism.
 - f) **Acknowledged** the important role of CROP agencies and their governing bodies in implementing regional service delivery initiatives.

Framework for Pacific Regionalism

3. The Framework for Pacific Regionalism includes:
 - a) Leaders' Pacific Vision;
 - b) Pacific regional values; and
 - c) Statement on strategic direction based on coordination, cooperation, collaboration, harmonization, economic integration and political integration.
4. The Framework will have processes for prioritising and monitoring regional initiatives; and monitoring and evaluation, to ensure there is a level of transparency and accountability to Forum Members. The Framework aims to recognise the importance of national efforts in complementing regional processes and ensuring that Pacific Leaders focus on high level priorities.
 - a) The Leaders Pacific Vision states a "*region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives*".
 - b) The shared regional values include "*value and depend upon the integrity of our vast ocean and our island resources; and "treasure the diversity and heritage of the Pacific and seek an inclusive future in which cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed"*".

- c) The Path to Deeper Integration will require Pacific countries to pursue regional integration through immediate and long term goals, and time bound strategic priorities that will be monitored and measurable.
- d) Leaders will consider the recommendations from the new Specialist Forum Officials Committee which will help identify a small number of regional initiatives for the region to focus on and provide directions on further policy development, implementation, and reporting.
- e) The Framework will be measured through CROP Agencies working together *“to develop a high-level regional monitoring framework, linking regional work across key areas to the pursuit of higher-order objectives for regionalism and the fulfilment of SDGs / post-2015 development goals”*.
- f) The Forum Secretariat will use criteria for regional implementation which will be a series of tests for regional action, ranging from sovereignty, net benefit, political and duplication tests.

Specialist sub-committee of the Forum Officials Committee

- 5. The Pacific Plan Review (2013) identified the Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC) as too large in its membership to be effective and accountable to Pacific Leaders. The Secretariat views the replacement of the PPAC as a lost opportunity for CROP agencies to have direct and invaluable interaction with Pacific island countries regarding regional and national priorities. SPREP is interested to see how the new arrangements will improve the situation and/or address the problems that may have previously existed with the PPAC.
- 6. The main focus for SPREP is that there is a formal mechanism for the CROP to engage and provide direct input to the specialist sub-committee of the Forum Officials Committee (FOC), beyond representation of views through and by the Secretary-General. The independence of the specialist sub-committee is duly noted, however the process for recognising the mandates and different membership of other CROP agencies and the mechanism for incorporating the technical inputs and expertise of the CROP agencies, is unclear.
- 7. The process for selecting specialists for the sub-committee will need a clear and transparent selection criteria of desired skill sets, expertise and qualifications. There must also be clear guidelines on transparency and accountability in the prioritization of issues and the decision-making process which shall guide the Pacific Leaders. SPREP also views the importance of clear criteria for the assessment and on-going monitoring of the effectiveness of the new specialist sub-committee.
- 8. In the Forum Communiqué (2014) the *“Leaders endorsed the Specialist FOC Sub-Committee for Regionalism, to be composed of allocated positions for suitably-skilled representatives from each sub-region, Australia or New Zealand, a Smaller Island State, civil society and the private sector, with the Secretary General (the permanent Chair of CROP), as Sub-Committee Chair and supported by co-opted specialists as required, and be selected by a panel of Forum members serving on a rotational basis”*. It is hoped that as the committee evolves that co-opted specialists may include technical experts from other CROP agencies, where relevant and appropriate.

Rationalising Regional Meetings

- 9. SPREP has different membership to the Pacific Islands Forum, including territories and metropolitan member countries outside of Australia and New Zealand. This is particularly

important regarding the political status of territories, which are equal members of SPREP, as are all the metropolitan members. SPREP holds Ministerial meetings every two years, a system which is working well, and is an effective part of the governance structure and should continue. Any change to these meeting schedules would have to be discussed and agreed to by the SPREP Governing Council, at the SPREP meeting.

10. There are other issues relating to the time involved in meetings that are important to consider: (a) the increasing number of international meetings which Pacific island ministers and officials are attending; and (b) the time involved from officials attending different meetings. SPREP considers that CROP agencies and others involved in the organisation of meetings should, where possible, combine or merge related meetings, such as the combined climate and disaster meetings held in Nadi in 2013, towards the development of the integrated strategy. Furthermore there should be an increase in the use of video conferencing and technology, for meetings, which must be considered as an option for the CROP to explore.
11. In the Forum Communiqué (2014) the *“Leaders affirmed the important roles and continued coordination of CROP agencies in relation to the Framework for Pacific Regionalism and its associated processes and requested all CROP organisations to consult with their governing bodies and non-member partners on participating in a comprehensive review of regional meetings”*. It is the view of SPREP given the rationalized approach already taken by the Secretariat, that it shall remain the prerogative of the SPREP Governing Council to decide on any changes in line with the SPREP mandate and membership.

Strengthening coordination of regionalism

12. It is the view of SPREP that the Framework for Pacific Regionalism should build on systems that are working, such as the CROP Working Group system, and to improve the processes wherever possible. The monitoring and evaluation process proposed by the Framework will enable accountability for reporting on such achievements and challenges to be addressed in the region. The Framework places great emphasis on political ownership and leadership by Forum member countries to determine the priorities and pathway for deeper regional integration. It also recognizes the different mandates and governing councils of CROP agencies, but there is still a need for a more clear mechanism for greater and direct input from CROP agencies to Forum Leaders on issues of critical importance to the region.