

A monthly e-bulletin from the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

MESSAGE FROM MR. KOSI LATU, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SPREP

Talofa from Apia!

In commemoration of the Protect Pacific Whales – Our Ocean Voyagers campaign, this is a SPREP Tok Special featuring highlights of the flagship event of our regional campaign, the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference held in April. It resulted in a Pacific Whale Declaration signed by 11 countries. The conference was aimed at assessing emerging threats to whales from changes occurring in our oceans, and also helped to prepare a regional perspective for the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference in June.

Back at the SPREP campus, a workshop was held to discuss the Pacific iCLIM Project, which aims to enhance regional capacity in climate change information knowledge management across the Pacific. The project is run by Griffith University in partnership with SPREP, and it builds on the Pacific Climate Change Portal, a go-to regional hub for climate change data, which was launched in 2012. You can read more about it in the latest issue of [Climate Change Matters](#).

We also celebrated the World Water and Forests Day in Samoa on the 19 April. The event was organised by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and saw both government and non-governmental organisations come together to recognise the importance of protecting our forests and water. You can read more about this event on our [SPREP website](#).

We hope you enjoy this special issue of the SPREP-Tok featuring the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference highlights.

We'd like to acknowledge the Kingdom of Tonga in hosting such a wonderful event with us and the Auckland Institute of Studies, New Zealand. We'd also like to say Malo 'Aupito to our many sponsors and partners – all of whom have made valuable contributions toward this successful event.

Malo 'aupito,

Director General, SPREP

SPECIAL EDITION



Mr Kosi Latu, Director General of SPREP with HE Mr. Jonathan Sinclair, British High Commissioner in New Zealand Taulapapa Brenda Heather-Latu, Honorary Consul after their meeting at the SPREP compound in Apia.



Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference, Nuku'alofa, Tonga.



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Our vision: A resilient Pacific environment sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

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WHALES IN A CHANGING OCEAN CONFERENCE OPENS IN TONGA



Marking a new approach to whale conservation in the Pacific Region, the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference was officially opened in Nukualofa, Tonga in April.

The conference aimed to assess emerging threats to whales from changes occurring in our oceans, as well as review the ecosystem and economic value of whales in the Pacific islands. It also prepared a regional perspective for upcoming international flora including the United Nations Ocean Conference to be held in New York in June.

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TONGA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO PROTECT WHALES

By Iliesa Tora, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Climate Change and Communications of Tonga (MEIDECC)



Image courtesy of Tourism Tonga.

The Government of Tonga has reaffirmed its commitment to the Royal Proclamation of His Majesty King Tupou IV in 1978, by re-declaring that all Tongan waters is declared a Sanctuary for Whales.

The reaffirmation was announced by the Acting Prime Minister, Hon Siaso Sovaleni while speaking as the chief guest at the opening of the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference in Nukualofa.

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PACIFIC LEADERSHIP SHINES ON WHALE CONSERVATION



Image courtesy of Tourism Tonga.

One of the world's most successful conservation efforts was celebrated at the opening of the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference in Nuku'alofa. A Royal Decree halting subsistence whaling in Tonga in 1978 has seen the migratory population of humpback whales breeding in Tonga each winter grow from an estimated population of 50 or so, to over 3,000.

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PROTECTING OCEAN GIANTS IN THE COOK ISLANDS



Hon Kiriau Turepu, Minister of Environment, Cook Islands.

The Cook Islands was a beacon of hope at the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference, highlighting its strong testament to raising standards on ocean stewardship and management of its natural resources.

Just days since announcing all water within 50 nautical miles of the island nation is now under protection from commercial fishing, the Cook Islands has further stressed this aims to reduce the interactions between the commercial fishing sector and whales within Cook Island waters.

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NEW ZEALAND ANNOUNCES FUNDING TO SUPPORT WHALE RESEARCH IN NIUE

By Tupou Taumoepeau for the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference

Research to further help unlock the secrets of the Oceania Humpback Whale in Niue will take place with support from the government of New Zealand. This will help further assist in the protection and conservation of humpback whales in the Pacific. The announcement was made at the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference in Nukualofa.

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Photo courtesy of Niue Tourism Office.

WHALE POO AND CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE AGENDA AT PACIFIC WHALE CONFERENCE



Image courtesy of Tourism Tonga.

What do whale excrement and climate change have in common? More than you think, according to a special report on Climate Change and Whales that was presented before the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference in Tonga.

Climate change impacts are far reaching, touching the lives of Pacific islanders as well as Pacific whales. Warmer waters are expected to bring about a change in the distribution of many whale species, their food chain may be disrupted and there may be increased competition between species which occupy separate spaces.

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SEA AND WHALES ARE LAHAINA'S BEST FRIENDS

By Iliesa Tora, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Climate Change and Communications of Tonga (MEIDECC).



Ms Lahaina Tatafu.

Twenty two year old Lahaina Tatafu grew up and believed she would one day become a lawyer. In fact she was determined as a young seven year old that she would be a legal bird. Although her father Sam is a well-known qualified diver, Lahaina never had any inclination towards the sea and what it had to offer. But fate changed and Lahaina is now dubbed Tonga's own 'Moana', having developed to be a master whale tour guide and swimmer.

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FOUNDER OF OMA TAFUA DRIVES WHALE CONSERVATION IN NIUE

By Tupou Taumoepeau for the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference



L-R, Ms Fiafia Rex of Niue with Ms Tiare Holm of Palau.

The stories of whale conservation from a Pacific island woman have been carried from the waters of Niue to the shores of Tonga, and shared at the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference.

Meaning 'to treasure whales' – Oma Tafua was established by Ms Fiafia Rex over a decade ago, and is dedicated to the education, protection and conservation of marine mammals in the Niuean community.

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ART EXHIBITION RELAYS MESSAGES ON WHALES PROTECTION

By Iliesa Tora, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Climate Change and Communications of Tonga (MEIDECC).

Art can be a great tool to pass on the message about Whales and the need to protect them in our oceans here in Oceania, says the Pew Charitable Trusts in New Caledonia. Presenting during a side show at the "Whales in a Changing Ocean" conference, Ms Aline Schaffar of Pew said their current exhibition at the Tjibaou Gallery in Noumea reflects these important messages. A total of eight artists took part in the three-week work programme, with five from New Caledonia and three from the region.

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Ms Aline Schaffar, Pew Charitable Trust, New Caledonia.

WHALES IMPORTANT FOR GROWING INDUSTRY

By Iliesa Tora, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster



Whale watching off the coast of Tonga. Photo: Tourism Tonga.

Whale watching is a growing industry that is making Tonga a top destination for whale-watchers annually. But a lot more needs to be done so that locals can benefit more while whales also need to be protected so that they can continue to keep coming back to our waters.

Two respected personnel in the tourism and whale watching industry made the comment while speaking at the “Whales in a Changing Ocean” conference at the Tanoa Dateline Hotel in Nuku’alofa. Former Tourism Tonga Director Semisi Taumoepeau and Erich Hoyt, Research Fellow (Whale and Dolphin Conservation Programme Lead, Critical Habitat and Marine Protected Areas Co-Chair, IUCN SSC-WCPA Marine Mammals Protected Areas Task Force) made presentations at the conference.

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WHALE SANCTUARY OPENS UP TOURISM OPPORTUNITY FOR TOKELAU

By Tupou Taumoepeau for the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference



Mr Mikaele Perez, Director for the Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment, Tokelau. Photo: SPREP

“There is a potential market for whale watching in Tokelau with good regional models to support the initiative,” says Mikaele Perez Director for the Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment. Representing Tokelau, Mr Perez says being part of the whales in a Changing Ocean conference has opened up opportunities and given him a deeper insight into the conservation of whales as part of the Pacific region.

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11 SPREP MEMBERS SIGN ON TO PACIFIC WHALE DECLARATION



The Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference closed on a high note with 11 countries signing on to the Pacific Islands Year of the Whale Declaration.

The declaration calls for strengthened whale conservation across the Pacific region and saw Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu sign on to the declaration.

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NEW MOUS TO STRENGTHEN MARINE PROTECTION IN THE PACIFIC REGION



SPREP Director General, Mr Kosi Latu, signed on behalf of SPREP, while Mr David Paton, Director, signed on behalf of BPM. Photo: SPREP

The Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference gave us much to celebrate. Two new agreements were signed between SPREP, one with Blue Planet Marine (BPM) and the other with the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium (SPWRC).

The MoU with BPM sets out to provide a framework for cooperation between the two organisations for the next five years, where they will be collaborating in the implementation of surveys for marine biodiversity.

The second MOU with SPWRC, also for a period of five years, looks to strengthen the partnership between the two organisations as they work in collaboration to ensure the protection of cetaceans as well as providing advice to governments to strengthen the Pacific’s capacity to protect cetaceans in the region.

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For more information about the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference, including presentations and statements, please visit www.sprep.org/whales-in-a-changing-ocean-conference-2017/home

For more images from the Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference, please visit our [Facebook](#) page.