

Pacific Islands Year of the Whale Declaration 2016/17

We, the undersigned Ministers and government officials from Pacific Islands and Territories gathered at the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference held in Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, 4-6 April 2017, to celebrate the Year of the Whale in the Pacific Islands and Territories:

CONSCIOUS of the deep cultural relationship, including traditional knowledge, between whales and Pacific peoples;

RECALLING that many species of large whales that overwinter in Pacific islands breeding grounds were reduced to near-extinction by industrial whaling fleets in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries;

AWARE that some populations of these species are now recovering in numbers, thanks to the global moratorium on commercial whaling imposed and maintained by the International Whaling Commission;

GRATEFUL that many Pacific island countries and territories have established legislation, whale sanctuaries, and other commitments which add to the regional protection of whales;

NOTING that for many Pacific island countries and territories, the presence of whales in their waters is an important cultural resource, and that well-managed whale-watching activities can promote sustainable economic benefits;

AWARE also that recovering populations of whales in the Pacific island countries and territories are now at risk from an emerging range of new threats, including climate change, entanglement in marine debris, by-catch in fishing operations, noise and pollution;

ENDORISING the Year of the Whale theme that whales are living sentinels that reflect and contribute to the health of our oceans;

GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGING the generous hospitality of the Government of Tonga and the excellent arrangements provided to host the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference;

ACKNOWLEDGING the contributions of regional and international agencies, IGOs, NGOs, private sector and others to promote the recovery of whale populations;

NOW THEREFORE

RECOGNISE that lost and abandoned fishing gear is one of the most harmful forms of marine debris for whales, and that accelerated action to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution is needed;

COMMEND SPREP's commitment to the production of a Whale and Dolphin Action Plan to provide a framework for conservation activities in the Pacific islands region 2018-2023;

REQUEST the experts at the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference to work with SPREP to develop a draft Whale and Dolphin Action Plan for their review and endorsement at the SPREP Annual Meeting in September 2017;

REQUEST SPREP to engage with Pacific islands and territories and others to identify key capacity development needs for the conservation of whales, for consideration in the 2018-2023 Whale and Dolphin Action Plan;

COMMIT our governments to collaborations with other Pacific islands and territories to provide a secure future for whales in the Pacific islands region;

WELCOME the engagement and contribution of all stakeholders in this endeavour, including IGOs, NGOs, academia, the private sector, civil society and local communities;

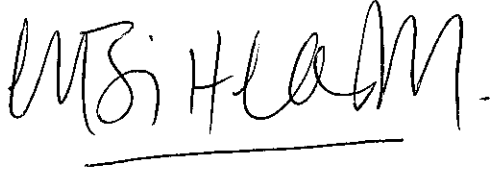
WELCOME new partnerships including multilateral organisations, to implement voluntary commitments by Pacific islands and territories to meet the aspirations of this Declaration.

This Declaration will remain open for signature until 31 December 2017



Signed in Nuku'alofa, 6 April 2017, by the Ministers and representatives of:

Suzi Heaton
Department of Environment and Energy
Australia



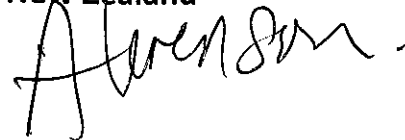
Hon Kiriau Turepu
Minister for Environment
Cook Islands



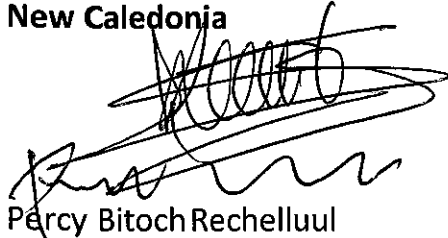
Joshua Wycliffe
Permanent Secretary for Environment
Fiji



Amy Laurenson
Special Adviser, MFAT
New Zealand



Soumynie Kartadiwirja
Chief of Staff, Ministry of Economy
New Caledonia

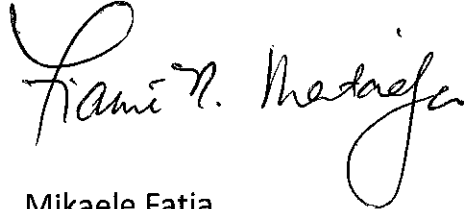


Percy Bitoch Rechelluul
Senior Fisheries Adviser
Palau

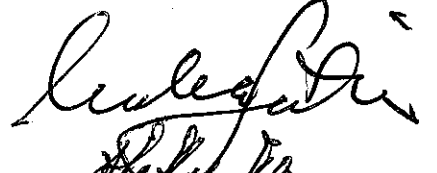
Michael Kaiglo Bongro
Director for Special Projects, CEPA
Papua New Guinea



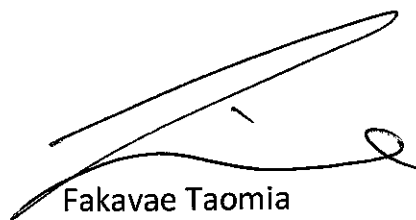
Hon Fiame Mataafa
Deputy Prime Minister
Samoa



Mikaele Fatia
Director Environment & Fisheries
Tokelau



Hon Semisi Fakahau
Minister of Fisheries
Tonga



Fakavae Taomia
CEO, Office of the Prime Minister
Tuvalu