

## **WHALES IN A CHANGING OCEAN CONFERENCE**

4 – 6 April 2017, Tanoa Hotel, Nukualofa, Tonga

### **TOKELAU COUNTRY STATEMENT**

Honourable Deputy Prime Ministers  
Honourable Ministers  
Director General of SPREP  
Honourable Chairperson  
Senior Officials  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like first of all join the previous speakers in thanking the Government and people of Tonga for the warm hospitality extended to our delegation upon arrival and also for hosting this important meeting on your beautiful islands.

Honourable Chair, in April 2010, the late Faipule Foua Toloa, Ulu o Tokelau at the time announced Tokelau's intention to declare a national whale sanctuary in Tokelau's EEZ of 290,000km<sup>2</sup>. In 2011 Faipule Toloa made the Tokelau Whale Sanctuary a commitment by Tokelau to the Pacific Island Forum Leaders' Pacific Oceanscape, an initiative also endorsed by Tokelau.

Tokelau comprises three atolls in the South Pacific Ocean between 171° and 173° W longitude and 8° and 10° S latitude. The islands appear to represent habitat for sperm whales, killer whales and anecdotal sightings data suggest, the area is frequented by many other cetacean species including pilot and minke whales which also indicates the presence of Endangered Oceania humpback whales.

#### **SOME OF THE VALUES OF A WHALE/ MARINE SANCTUARY FOR TOKELAU**

##### **Conserve migratory species:**

Some marine animals are migratory in nature and thus spend different stages of their life cycles in EEZs of different countries at different times of the year. Because of this nature, these species require regional and even global cooperation for their management and protection. It is important to consider that Tokelau may be a migration corridor for these migratory species, especially to breeding grounds.

##### **Help threatened species to recover:**

A marine sanctuary will help local species that have become threatened to recover. In addition, certain threatened marine animals migrate long distances, e.g. whales, and a national sanctuary will help in the regional as well as the global effort to manage/protect these resources. Importantly a sanctuary will protect the breeding/nursery ground of a Endangered Oceania humpback whales and others.

**Help maintain/improve marine biodiversity:**

A national marine sanctuary will not only help threatened species to recover, but it will also help in the recruitment process of healthy populations thus keeping them at healthy levels and minimizing the possibility of them becoming threatened. Thus, a sanctuary will help in the conservation of marine biodiversity.

**Protect marine ecosystems by identifying and managing threats:**

Apart from preserving and recovery of marine species, a marine sanctuary will help in minimizing the degradation of the marine environment from pollution, consistent with Tokelau's Fishing Regulations 1988 (12.1.i) and draw attention to other threats such as fisheries interactions, boat collisions, and climate change on key marine species and their habits.

**Support and develop the nature tourism industry:**

A national marine sanctuary can lead to development of the tourism industry. For example, whale watching in the Pacific Islands is now a key attraction to international visitors earning the region over \$21 million USD per year. In neighboring Tonga, tourists go to considerable expense and travel time to get to the northern islands of Vava'u specifically to see whales. There is a potential market for this in Tokelau with good regional models to support the initiative.

**Attract support for education and research:**

A Marine Sanctuary will help to increase our knowledge and understanding of marine species and ecosystems in Tokelau. At the 2010 meeting of the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium (SPWRC) support was pledged to Tokelau to assist in identifying and managing marine mammals in their waters. SPREP and partnering NGO's are also able to provide support and technical advice to Tokelau in implementing the research and education values of their sanctuary.

Malo Aupito