

Laucala Declaration on Conservation in Oceania

From 2-6 December 2013, more than 700 participants from the Pacific and around the world met in Laucala, Suva, Fiji, for the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas.

Noting that Pacific ecosystems provide essential and valuable resources not only for Pacific islands, but also for the entire world, participants agreed to the following:

1. The small economies and populations of the Pacific islands have very limited financial capacity, yet are stewards for an immense area of ocean and its associated global ecosystem services.
2. Management of natural resources is as fundamental to sustainable development as education and human health. There is a need for greater investment in the conservation of ecosystem services, especially in light of ongoing stressors upon Pacific ecosystems, many of which are predicted to be exacerbated by climate change.
3. The essential services provided by intact Pacific ecosystems are often hidden, not recognised or fully accounted. Fisheries, tourism opportunities, coastal protection, carbon sequestration and future resilience all depend upon appropriately valuing our natural resources.
4. We should not settle for short-term gains; a long-term commitment is needed to protect our environment. A resilient and diverse environment means happy people.
5. Everyone has a responsibility to safeguard the environment, on land and in the ocean.
6. Individual communities are the backbone of conservation; ordinary people need to be empowered to implement a regional conservation strategy.
7. We need to harness the leadership skills of other influential elements of Pacific Islands society, such as faith-based groups and village councils; and to provide opportunities for youth engagement in all aspects of conservation.
8. The time for argument and prevarication is over - our very survival and that of future generations is at stake.

We recognise that the following challenges are at the heart of the environmental crisis facing the Pacific Islands region:

Climate Change

9. We are living in a new climate, with serious environmental, socio-economic and financial consequences.
10. Coral reefs are under increasing pressure from rising temperatures and ocean acidification. Reefs in the Pacific provide valuable ecosystem services, including as a food source and an important defence against a restless ocean. Effective Pacific networks for managing and monitoring coral reefs, to retain resilience and food security, need to be supported and developed.
11. The global discussion on climate change has not sufficiently engaged on biodiversity impacts, nor the importance of biodiversity as a basis for resilience and protection for coastal communities.
12. While positive signs are emerging in many parts of the world, from a Pacific perspective, there is a perplexing failure of the global community to respond to climate change and our very existence is under direct threat. This is the critical decade for limiting the impacts of climate change through mitigation and reducing fossil fuel use. Pacific island countries should continue to embrace renewable energy technologies and energy efficiencies, and also to present the case that global carbon emissions need to be urgently reduced.

Invasive Species

13. Invasive species continue to pose one of the most significant and immediate threats to biodiversity, livelihoods, food security, cultural heritage, ecosystem services and the resilience of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and communities. They are a severe limitation and threat to sustainable development.
14. We are encouraged by the growing number of success stories of invasive species prevention, eradication and control across the Pacific, and by the practical, cooperative approaches shown by all stakeholders.
15. We welcome the recent funding opportunity for invasive species prevention, eradication and control such as the GEF-PAS and programmes supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. However, the Pacific Island Countries and Territories continue to face an on-going and growing threat from invasive species. Awareness of this problem and the urgent need for action must be raised at key international fora and with bilateral and multilateral donors, including GEF, in order to secure the significant resources required for implementing effective prevention and management programmes at the national and regional levels.

Traditional knowledge

16. There is a critical need to capture and utilise traditional knowledge, especially its synergies with science, as a basis for more effective nature conservation and sustainable development. This knowledge is threatened and needs to be preserved. The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) could play a critical role in strengthening the science-policy interface. We welcome IPBES's emphasis on multi-disciplinarity and the involvement of Pacific island countries in building synergies between indigenous and local knowledge systems and modern science.

Coastal fisheries

17. Coastal and inshore fisheries resources are vital for food security and sustainable livelihoods of Pacific people. It is an urgent priority that management of these fisheries and coastal resources be improved. Governments need to develop and adequately support management systems that involve all coastal communities in partnerships to support the local and traditional management of nearby ecosystems and fish stocks. We applaud ground breaking regional policies on coastal fisheries such as the Apia Policy and the proposed MSG Roadmap for the protection of inshore fisheries and we call for this promising foundation to lead to action at scale.

Pelagic fisheries

18. Commercial fishing is exerting significant pressure on large predatory oceanic fishes in the Pacific islands region. Several species, in particular bigeye tuna, have been greatly reduced in abundance over the past two decades.
19. Sharks are particularly vulnerable. To improve the conservation of both oceanic and coastal species, more effort needs to be made to implement the provisions of the SPREP/SPC/FFA Regional Plan of Action on Sharks, various National Plans of Action on Sharks, and relevant Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Conservation and Management Measures for Sharks. Additionally, the provisions of recent decisions on sharks and rays by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and conservation measures for certain shark species adopted by the Convention for Migratory Species, need to be implemented.

20. In addition to being an important economic commodity, large pelagic fish play a key role in ocean biodiversity and ecosystem health. To maintain ecological balance, and to safeguard tuna, sharks and billfish for future generations, catches must be at safe and sustainable levels, and limits need to be enforced on the number and fishing power of vessels deployed into the Pacific islands fisheries.
21. The Pacific Oceanscape provides a framework for concerted and coordinated action by Pacific island countries and territories, with assistance of the CROP agencies, partners and civil society to conserve the resources of our ocean for the benefit of future generations of Pacific islanders.

Deep sea minerals

22. Extraction industries for deep sea minerals may have significant consequences. Yet much is still unknown about the potential impacts of deep sea mining on food security, livelihoods, species diversity and potential benefits of deepwater organisms.
23. Greater cross-sectoral engagement, including civil society, in the issue of exploration and extraction of deep sea minerals is strongly encouraged.

Agricultural land use

24. On many smaller islands, especially atolls, traditional agricultural land use systems are biodiverse and for many native species they are the main remaining habitat, and need to be included in conservation strategies. Including agricultural areas in conservation strategies will also assist with reducing invasive species pathways, whereas responding to such invasions through the poorly-managed use of pesticides for their control on small islands may result in the loss of biodiversity.

Coastal Littoral Forest and Beach Ecosystems

25. Only limited attention has been paid to some critical areas of Pacific islands' coastlines, which provide vital services but are highly threatened, e.g. by clearing and invasive species. For some atolls in particular, coastal littoral forests, (the only forests on most atolls, and the main habitat for vulnerable species of sea birds, turtles and land crabs), are the only terrestrial ecosystems that provide valuable ecosystem goods and services. For many coastal, small island and atoll communities, they are the last defence against climate change and extreme weather and tidal events.
26. Beaches are on the front line against climate change and extreme weather events and throughout the region are threatened by accelerated erosion and loss. On many atolls, sand is derived from living organisms, which are threatened by pollution, climate change and acidification of the ocean, and over exploitation. These "biogenic" beaches will not return if the living sources of sand are lost.

Freshwater fishes

27. Many islands in the region have endemic species of freshwater fish, which are being negatively affected by anthropogenic activities – primarily mining, populations of invasive species, destruction of riparian and 'ridge' habitat, and gravel extraction. Increased turbidity of streams and pollution also negatively affect populations.
28. The freshwater biodiversity of a large number of freshwater systems in the Pacific islands has not yet been recorded, so we have only a limited idea of how much has been lost in recent years. There is an urgent need to identify and protect remaining areas of high biodiversity from impacts of logging and mining, aquaculture of alien species, etc.

We propose the following approaches to address these challenges:

29. Communities are calling for a greater role in conservation and development of the finite resources that are fundamental to their livelihoods and heritage. Community-driven approaches, and the use of social networks, are becoming a proven tool, as supported by experiences in the Locally Managed Marine Areas network, and are fundamental to improving both marine and land-based ecosystem management, as well as reducing the risk of natural hazards and enhancing adaptation to climate change and other threats. More support is needed to improve “community at heart” initiatives and expand them to all our communities.
30. There is a need to determine the state of conservation and find practical, achievable and affordable solutions to challenges and threats.
31. There is a need to work closely with the private sector to develop and adopt best practices.
32. Innovative approaches, such as the closure of high seas areas to fishing by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and the Green Fee introduced by Palau to fund its Protected Area Network, are needed to deliver on conservation commitments. Closer alignment is needed with sustainable development, which must be embedded in a whole of society and whole of government approach.
33. There is a need to continue to foster partnerships with communities, government and development agencies to deliver conservation outcomes.

Reinforcing Resilience and Sustainability

34. In the face of emerging and intensifying threats to biodiversity and cultural heritage from climate change and other threats, the future of Pacific island communities depends on maintaining and enhancing resilience and sustainability, requiring national, regional and international community support and assistance, including but not restricted to:
 - commitment to programmes which focus on building resilience in Pacific communities and environments;
 - commitment to using innovative community-based natural solutions;
 - implementing conservation activities using the approaches and principles of ecosystem-based management and adaptation;
 - ensuring activities include a focus on building the adaptive capacity of communities and ecosystems;
 - ensuring activities develop and use learning networks and other appropriate tools;
 - retaining, safeguarding and utilising traditional knowledge and culture.

Ecosystem-based Adaptation

35. Ecosystem-based Adaptation approaches should be encouraged and increased as an important natural solution approach to maintain intact ecosystems while building resilience in Pacific islands.
36. Experience from case studies shows that ecosystem management on small islands needs to operate at the scale at which biological, physical and governance processes occur. All efforts need to have a primary focus on sustainability, replicability and cost effectiveness to deliver effective conservation and ecosystem management outcomes.

Ecosystem Service Valuations

37. Many ecosystem services provided by intact Pacific island ecosystems are either taken for granted or not recognized and, therefore, not accounted for in management decision making process. Increased use of economic valuations of ecosystem services, as well as building capacity with Pacific island decision makers to use and absorb these approaches, will assist in better informed and balanced decision making for adaptation planning, resource use and integrated ecosystem management.

Aichi Targets

38. The Aichi 2020 Targets of the Convention on Biodiversity should be the umbrella targets for nature conservation in the Pacific Islands. They represent the new global paradigm for action on biodiversity, and will be adopted and embedded in Pacific Island Country NBSAPs. They will be the standards against which progress will be measured in the future.

Access and Benefit Sharing

39. Pacific island countries recognise the potential benefits afforded by the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing and encourage timely ratification of that instrument and the implementation of domestic frameworks to protect genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge and to ensure fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from their utilisation.

Making our voice heard

40. As Chair of G77 and China, Fiji has significant opportunities to present the Pacific view, including at UNGA. The SIDS Conference in Samoa (September 2014) will also be a major opportunity to convey the Pacific's voice, as will the CBD COP 12 (October 2014) and the World Parks Congress in Sydney (November 2014).

Adopted 6 December 2013 by the participants to the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, Laucala, Suva, Fiji