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**AGENDA ITEM 12.1.4:**  
**Climate Change and Oceans**

**Purpose of Paper**

1. To inform Members of recent developments in the field of climate change and oceans.
2. To inform Members of oceans related projects with relevance to climate change.
3. To seek guidance from Members on SPREP engagement in the oceans/climate change nexus.

**Background**

4. Climate change and oceans have been under serious discussion in the region since the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in recognition of the fact that oceans did not feature explicitly in the Paris Agreement, instead being subsumed under the rubric of ecosystems.
5. In recognition of the central role that oceans play in regulating the climate system, producing oxygen, storing carbon, and absorbing excess heat, and the significant acceleration of the impacts of this role, work has been on-going to seek greater international recognition of, and action on, the climate change and oceans nexus. Climate induced ocean warming, acidification, and deoxygenation, as well as sea level rise and altered currents and oceanographic conditions, are already having significant impacts on Pacific people, marine resources and economies. With increasing non-climate-linked anthropogenic impacts to the health of our ocean such as marine litter and destructive fishing methods, the impacts of climate change represent a threat multiplier and demands urgent action and investment to protect marine environments, coastal zones, biodiversity, people and economies.
6. The Government of Fiji took the lead in this work in the region and internationally, by gathering information and seeking to build a consensus around possible approaches. Cooperation with the Governments of Chile, Norway and Sweden enabled Fiji to gain significant support for this work, including through CROP agencies with SPREP contributing, through technical assistance to discussions with senior officials from the region at meetings such as the Climate Action Pacific Partnership sessions in Suva in 2017, 2018 and 2019..

**Current state of play**

7. Senior officials in the region agree that ocean-climate change action is necessary to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. As well as its role in regulating the climate, the ocean is a source of climate mitigation and adaptation solutions, from the restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems to the creation of well-enforced fisheries management measures and marine protected areas. The challenge identified by the region at a recent symposium hosted by Fiji, is how the UNFCCC should address ocean issues-what are the region's goals, and how is the region to achieve them.

8. Since COP21 various international partnerships (Because the Ocean, the Ocean Pathway Partnership, the Global Ocean Forum, and the Friends of the Ocean and Climate) have done much to raise awareness of the need, opportunities and challenges for an international focus on oceans and climate change, including in the Pacific region.
9. Opportunities in 2019 to raise awareness of the ocean-climate change nexus, build political momentum, and mobilize ocean-climate change action include the Secretary General's Climate Summit (SG Summit) and the launch of the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), as well as COP25.
10. A background paper presented to Pacific delegations attending the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies meeting in Bonn in June 2019 identified oceans/climate nexus challenges as including:
  - Blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, seagrasses etc.) are highly efficient at sequestering carbon, however these ecosystems are also threatened by climate change;
  - In order for blue carbon activities to be included in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) they also have to demonstrate a direct set of anthropogenic (human made or implemented) actions. There can be no credit for what nature is already doing by itself, thus the absorption of carbon by oceans cannot be included under current rules;
  - Stringent monitoring, reporting and verification systems would be required to recognize and account for blue carbon ecosystem sequestration if it were to be counted in NDCs, a complex process likely to have costs exceeding the value of the carbon sequestered.
11. Bonn discussions clarified that while oceans and climate change remain a strategic Pacific priority, the region is more focused on the priority for adaptation in the oceans and coastal zones, and on preventing or reducing climate change impacts such as ocean acidification.
12. COP25 will be a key event for progressing the ocean and climate nexus in the UNFCCC. The discussion will build on the 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, and on the forthcoming IPCC report on The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC) (due in September 2019). The IPCC 1.5°C report is a landmark report with far reaching implications to oceans and coasts.
13. A focus on oceans by the UNFCCC may also benefit the UNFCCC process itself: oceans have rarely been a central focus of inventories, reports, contributions, or other elements of the UNFCCC. The potential for new partnerships and alliances around oceans in the COP such as those being pursued by Fiji may provide new energy to the UNFCCC, not based on old lines of difference, but along new lines of cooperation.

#### **Pacific Partnership on Ocean Acidification**

14. The New Zealand-Pacific Partnership on Ocean Acidification (PPOA) project is a collaborative effort between SPREP, the University of the South Pacific, and the Pacific Community to build resilience to ocean acidification (OA) in Pacific island communities and ecosystems with financial support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the government of the Principality of Monaco. (refer Attachment 1.)

15. The PPOA project was developed to address needs identified during the 3rd UN Small Island Developing States Conference in 2014 with Focal Areas on:

- Research and Monitoring;
- Supporting OA monitoring in the Pacific islands region;
- Capacity Building and Awareness Raising;
- Building capacity of Pacific islanders to understand, monitor, and adapt to OA;
- Raising awareness through production and distribution of OA info to media;
- Practical Adaptation Actions;
- Pilot sites in Fiji, Kiribati, and Tokelau;

16. PPOA works with communities to identify and implement stakeholder priorities for practical adaptation actions to enhance community and ecosystem resilience to OA. Adaptation actions include:

- Mangrove and seagrass restoration to locally buffer pH;
- Coral restoration to enhance reef resilience;
- Locally Managed Marine Areas to reduce reef stressors;
- Alternative livelihood opportunities to reduce reef fishing pressure and enhance food security

17. A side event will be held on day 2 of the 29th SPREP Meeting to provide further information to Members and provide an opportunity for more detailed discussion.

A number of other oceans initiatives pursue integrated climate change outcomes. The following initiatives are topics for consideration in this Meeting, including agenda items 7.1, 7.2, 8.3, 12.2.3, 12.3.2, 12.3.3 and 12.3.4.

## Recommendation

18. The Meeting is invited to:

1. **note** recent developments in the field of climate change and oceans;
2. **note** the oceans related projects with relevance to climate change;
3. **endorse** SPREP's engagement in oceans and climate change initiatives, and provide recommendations on further involvement by SPREP.

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26 July, 2019

