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**AGENDA ITEM 12.2.3:**

**Pacific Year of the Coral Reef 2018-2019: Update and Outcomes**

**Purpose of Paper**

1. To note the update and outcomes relating the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef 2018-2019.
2. To note progress in developing the Pacific Regional Coral Reef Action Plan.

**Background**

3. Healthy biodiversity is an important source of resources and Pacific species provide essential ecosystem services. For Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs), social and economic resilience and climate change resilience depend on protection and management of coastal and marine biodiversity, particularly the conservation of coral reefs. Coral reefs and their associated ecosystems (seagrass meadows and mangrove forests) play a key role in these economies and societies as well as in climate regulation.
4. Conservation and management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems in the Pacific region is a complex ecological issue encompassing social, political and cultural dimensions. Coral reefs and their ecosystem services are threatened by the effects of sediment runoff, pollution, marine debris and micro-plastics, coastal development, overfishing, and climate change impacts (sea-level rise, rise in sea temperatures, ocean acidification). Coral bleaching, crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, algal blooms, and over-harvesting have led to further declines in coral reef health and productivity.
5. The impacts from global warming are clear, with mass bleaching events becoming more devastating and more frequent, and events lasting longer than before. In 2015, the US NOAA announced that the third global bleaching event (2014-2017) was the longest, most widespread, and most damaging event on record. For example in the Pacific region, New Caledonia (2016), American Samoa (2015) and Samoa (2016) reported major bleaching events. Heat stress during this event also caused mass bleaching in several reefs that never bleached before. In the Northern Line Islands, Kiribati, persistent elevated ocean temperatures (as high as 31.4°C) in 2015-2016 killed most of the corals in that area.
6. Initiated by the International Coral Reef Initiative, the Third International Year of the Reef was declared in 2018. SPREP responded to the global call by dedicating 2018-2019 as the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef (PYOCR), a two-year SPREP thematic campaign which aims to strengthen the Pacific's coral reef management network. The outcome of the campaign is to provide Members with a comprehensive inventory of reef data in the region, while improving access to coral reef data to provide information for better decision making.

### **Pacific Year of the Coral Reef Activities:**

- 6.1 As part of the PYOCR, SPREP has developed country and territory briefs which are based on the Status and Trends of the Coral Reefs of the Pacific as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> State of Conservation in Oceania report (in preparation), supplemented with State of Environment reports, published scientific articles and expert advice. Reports are currently in their draft form and will be finalised in early 2020.
- 6.2 *Status and Trends of Coral Reefs of the Pacific* report initiated by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), including SPREP, was completed in 2018 and was distributed at the 33<sup>rd</sup> ICRI General Meeting in Monaco in December 2018. The report is being used to develop the country and territory briefs.
- 6.3 Monitoring, collection, storage and analysis of regional coral reef database from CRIOBE (Centre de Recherches Insulaires et Observatoire de l'Environnement) based on Moorea Island in French Polynesia is ongoing. CRIOBE has provided a portion of the data collected for the Status and Trends report and will provide data to SPREP. Data obtained through the PYOCR will also provide input to the INFORM and BIOPAMA projects.
- 6.4 Promotional events have included:
  - A focus on coral reefs at the 2018 SPREP Open Day, which included the official joint launching of the PYOCR and the *Status and Trends of the Coral Reefs of the Pacific* report.
  - SPREP ensured the promotion of the PYOCR through the EU BEST funded Pacific Biodiversity Blue Belt Project in Wallis and Futuna (mangrove educational trail), New Caledonia (Marine Protected Areas Management and surveillance workshop and study) and French Polynesia (underwater trails implementation) The PYOCR logo was widely used on promotional products and at relevant fora.
7. In 2018 the SPREP Executive Board Meeting approved the preparation of a Pacific Regional Coral Reef Action Plan. Funding was secured in early 2019 through Fonds Pacifique and a tender to contract a consultant to develop the action plan is in process. Development of the plan is being undertaken by SPREP in collaboration with the Pacific Coral Reef Institute based in CRIOBE. The draft action plan will be reviewed in November 2019 through a consultation process with PICTs and scientific institutes in the Pacific funded by the Government of Sweden through UN Environment.

### **Recommendation**

8. The Meeting is invited to:
  1. **note** the update and outcomes of the Pacific Year of Coral Reef 2018/2019; and
  2. **note** the progress in developing the Regional Coral Reef Action Plan.