

# [X] Declaration: Commitments to nature conservation action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021-2025

## Preamble

We, representatives of the governments of [X] Pacific Island countries and territories, our partner countries, and the Heads of Organisations of [X] members of the Pacific Islands Round Table for Nature Conservation, gathered for the High-Level Session of the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, declare that the global biodiversity crisis is urgent, and that transformative action must not be delayed. This crisis is an existential threat to our Pacific Ocean, our Pacific Islands, and to ourselves as Pacific peoples.

We note with grave concern that none of the global 2011-2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets have been fully met. The Blue Pacific collectively calls for all countries to adopt a strong deal for nature and people, to halt the loss of our natural ecosystems and put nature on a path to recovery by 2030. This common vision requires genuine commitments to urgently address the root causes of biodiversity loss, and agreement for immediate implementation across all areas of action.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a catastrophic reminder of the dependency of all our societies on healthy and resilient natural ecosystems. Our necessary social and economic recovery from the pandemic is a regional and global opportunity to transform our collective relationship with the natural world.

We recognize the potential of our Pacific Islands to lead the world in ecological stewardship, drawing on our rich indigenous heritage and the close relationship of our communities with the land and sea. We are committed to full and integrated implementation of the many existing international and regional efforts to address the biodiversity crisis, including the *Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation 2021-2025*. In this Declaration we recognise, endorse and commit to implementing 21 priority Action Tracks by 2025 to ensure the recovery and flourishing of both nature and people in the Blue Pacific.

## Our Ocean

Our Pacific Ocean is the foundation of our cultures, livelihoods and identities: our source of life. As island peoples we understand that we have obligations towards our ancestral ocean which supports and sustains us, both within and beyond our national jurisdictions. The Pacific Ocean has its own voice, agency, and rights to health and abundance, all of which are endangered by global and local threats including climate change, acidification, overfishing, plastics and other pollution, and seabed mining.

We reaffirm the regional ocean policy instruments already adopted by the Blue Pacific, and recommit to strengthened implementation of these. We likewise reaffirm the central role of our traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge in making wise decisions about our shared ocean.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

1. Expanding our networks of **marine protected areas** (MPAs), including locally managed marine areas. We will ensure that our MPA networks are ecologically representative, effectively managed, properly resourced, community-led, and socially equitable.

2. Maintaining and restoring **marine ecosystem integrity**, recognising the importance of threatened or significant ecosystems and habitats, such as coral reefs and seagrass beds, to our environmental, economic, and cultural wellbeing. We commit to managing, reducing, and eventually eliminating locally derived threats to marine ecological health, connectivity, and functioning.
3. Safeguarding our **threatened and migratory marine species**, recognising that the decline or loss of key species will fundamentally and irrevocably alter our oceanic ecosystems and livelihoods.
4. **Ending unsustainable fishing** in nearshore and pelagic waters, including the high seas. We commit to continued action on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which threatens marine ecosystems, livelihoods, human rights, and development opportunities in the Pacific.
5. **Preventing marine pollution** by eliminating sources of discharge within our region, transitioning to circular island economies, and advocating internationally for Pacific Rim polluters to improve consumption and waste practices. We stress the urgency of global action on plastic pollution, noting emerging evidence of the severe consequences of plastics for human and environmental health.
6. Entrenching a precautionary approach to any proposed **deep-sea and seabed mining** activities. We acknowledge the imperative for responsible stewardship of deep-sea and seabed environments in our national jurisdictions and on the high seas.

## **Our Islands**

As Pacific peoples, our islands are our homes. Our forests, soils, and wetlands have supported our societies for millennia, and our cultures, stories, and identities are inseparable from our lands. Multiple global and local pressures now pose existential risks to our islands, our people, and our ecologies: these include climate change, invasive species, overexploitation, pollution, wildfires, and the degradation and fragmentation of our ecosystems.

The health of our islands is intimately intertwined with that of our ocean and our people. We must work with our communities and partners to address multiple threats, and achieve multiple benefits, by working towards whole-domain environmental management across land and sea.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

7. Strengthening our networks of **terrestrial protected areas**, especially community-based areas utilising sustainable customary management practices. We note the importance of protected areas for our indigenous biodiversity, livelihoods, and resilience against climate threats.
8. Restoring **terrestrial ecosystem integrity** by reducing and managing threats to our native forests and agroecological systems. Traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge plays a key role in actively managing our islands towards restoration of their abundance and ecological functioning.
9. Safeguarding our **threatened and migratory terrestrial species**. We stress the need for well-resourced species recovery plans, especially for species of particular ecological, cultural or economic significance.

10. Implementing **nature-based solutions to sustain social-ecological systems** as a fundamental response to climate impacts, disaster risk management, water and food insecurity, and threats to human health.
11. **Battling invasive species** through biosecurity partnerships, sharing knowledge, and resourcing to increase management and eradication effectiveness.
12. **Preventing land and freshwater pollution** from industrial, agricultural, household and other sources on our islands, in partnership with communities and businesses.

### **Our Connection with Nature**

Our connection to our Pacific environments is expressed in our identities, livelihoods, cultural practices, and traditional, indigenous and local knowledge. It is also reflected in our natural resource-based economies, and we recognise the imperative that these resources are utilised sustainably in all our processes of economic development.

We reaffirm that our communities have the right to free, prior, and informed consent about all place-based nature conservation and economic development initiatives. Our communities also have rights to fair and equitable sharing of the monetary and other benefits of the utilisation of genetic resources.

We stress the central role of traditional knowledge holders, as well as elders, women, and youth, in decisions around environmental management.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

13. **Involving our people in conservation action** by engaging community and civil society organisations in the design, monitoring, and implementation of conservation initiatives, especially women's and youth organisations.
14. Promoting **behaviour change for nature conservation**, based on Pacific values, connection to place, and our traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge. We commit to supporting our educators, artists, traditional knowledge holders, elders, women, and youth to raise public awareness of locally relevant and restorative environmental practices.
15. Prioritising **ecosystem-based approaches to climate change, pandemic and disaster response**. 'One Health' solutions which enhance human, animal, and ecological health are crucial for mitigating outbreaks of disease, and provide essential resilience against natural disasters and climate change risks.
16. Leading the world in our transition to **sustainable and resilient ocean economies** that honour our voyaging heritage and reflect the direct dependence of coastal communities on the sea. We commit to developing and implementing strong and effective national ocean policies, and to ensuring environmental and social best practice in our waters.
17. Fostering **sustainable and resilient island economies** that reflect our indigenous heritage and values, and further integrating these values and environmental considerations into our national economic planning processes and legal frameworks.
18. Ensuring that **environmentally and culturally sensitive tourism** becomes expected practice throughout the Pacific.

## Implementation

Effective nature conservation for our ocean, islands and people depends on proper implementation, and we call on our partners to help us to foster Pacific leadership in our communities, governments, civil society and private sector. Committed and culturally grounded leadership is vital for confronting the ultimate and proximate drivers of our environmental crises.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

19. Growing our capacity for **science-based target-setting and monitoring**, ensuring informed decision-making in our policy and strategic planning processes.
20. Reinforcing **governance that works for nature conservation** that is transparent, equitable, and inclusive at community, national, and regional scales. We are committed to a Blue Pacific, regional response to our transboundary threats, and emphasise the global importance of strong environmental leadership that advocates for and from the Pacific.
21. Growing novel partnerships and approaches for **financing nature conservation** in the Pacific that are resilient in the face of global economic or political disruption.

## Call to Action

We state our strong commitment to implementing the urgent economic and societal transformations needed to address the biodiversity crisis that threatens both nature and people in our Pacific Islands. Averting this crisis depends not only on action within the Pacific region, but on worldwide cooperation to address the global drivers of environmental change which affect the Pacific so profoundly.

We note the unique opportunity presented by the negotiation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This must exceed previous frameworks in its scope, ambition, urgency, and ability to catalyse action. We call on all our regional partners, stakeholders, communities, and governments, as well as countries and non-state actors from around the world, to join the Blue Pacific in adopting and implementing a bold and truly transformational vision for nature and people.

This Declaration will be presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 2020, the Our Ocean Conference 2020, the United Nations Ocean Conference 2021, the IUCN World Conservation Conference 2021, and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, as part of the Blue Pacific's contribution to urgent global action for biodiversity.