

PACIFIC REGIONAL DECLARATION ON THE PREVENTION OF MARINE LITTER AND PLASTIC POLLUTION AND ITS IMPACTS

We, representatives of the people of the Pacific region and stewards of the world's largest ocean, meeting at the **Environment Ministers' High-Level Talanoa**, 10th September 2021, are deeply concerned about the impacts of plastics and microplastics pollution on our region and that the current patchwork of international legal instruments is not sufficient to prevent the acceleration of these impacts.

Recalling the international commitments made by the Parties to multilateral environmental agreements including – but not limited to - the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992, the Paris Agreement 2015, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, Basel Convention, International Human Rights instruments, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, SAMOA Pathway and the environmental principles notably the polluter-pays principle, precautionary approach and the inter-generational equity principle.

Further recalling the commitments made by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement 2021, the Parties to the Nouméa Convention 1986, and the Parties to the Waigani Convention 1995, and reaffirming the Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now 2019, the Vemöore Declaration 2020 and the Ocean Day Declaration on Plastic Pollution 2021.

Reiterating our commitment to work to protect our Ocean from harmful plastics through the implementation of our regional strategy Cleaner Pacific 2025, the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021 – 2025, the key actions for Pacific Island Countries and Territories in the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter 2018-2025 notably its support for the development of a global legal framework to address marine litter.

Expressing our grave concern about the environmental, social, cultural, economic, human health and, food security impacts of plastics pollution at each stage of its life cycle on the enjoyment of certain human rights for current and future generations. These impacts are due to linear economic models, disregard for or lack of adequate end-of-life management, insufficient support for the development of sustainable alternatives to plastics, continued production and use of unnecessary or harmful plastics, especially single-use plastic products, and open burning and dumping of plastic waste.

Further expressing our grave concern for migratory marine species such as seabirds, marine turtles and whales as they are especially vulnerable to the impacts of marine plastics through entanglement and ingestion of plastic and reaffirming these species as important cultural icons for Pacific peoples.

Calling specific attention to the fact that notwithstanding that the Pacific island countries contribute as little as 1.3% of global plastic pollution¹, we in the Pacific region are grossly and disproportionately affected by its impacts, particularly considering that we are not a major producer of plastics and their additives, and emphasizing the Second World Ocean Assessment stating that the highest recorded quantity of floating plastics are in the South Pacific subtropical gyre.

¹ <https://reports.eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/09/Plastic-Prevention-Gap-Analysis-2020.pdf>

Underlining that marine litter and plastic pollution is a transboundary global issue and that the Pacific region is often the recipient of the pollution, much of which originates thousands of kilometres from our shores and is carried to our countries by atmospheric and oceanic currents.

Deeply concerned about the accelerating rate of plastics consumption and production, underscoring the fact that 50% of all plastics produced are intended for the manufacture of single-use products, that the current 368 million metric tonnes of virgin plastics produced annually is set to double by 2040; that only 9% of all plastics ever produced have been recycled, and 12% have been incinerated; and that 79% of all plastics produced have accumulated in landfills or the environment².

Acknowledging the actions taken to reduce and eliminate single use and problematic plastics in the region and the need for more ambitious action and global and regional policy frameworks such as extended producer responsibility, container deposit systems and consumer awareness and responsibility.

Convinced that despite some progress at national and regional levels, the marine litter and plastic pollution crisis requires a dedicated and coordinated global and regional governance response with the support of all States and other institutional global and regional stakeholders.

Acknowledging the role played by all stakeholders throughout the full plastics lifecycle, from extraction, production, trade, manufacturing, consumption to waste management and environmental legacy and the need for global intervention and support for pollution prevention at each stage.

Cognizant of the vital global, regional and local ecosystem services provided by our Ocean and recalling SDG14, we are mindful of our role and responsibility as Ocean stewards to guard our Ocean from plastics pollution if we are to protect our peoples' cultural identity through protection of iconic species, fisheries and tourism industries, livelihoods, food security, and health.

Stressing the importance of incorporating Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations as appropriate and with their free prior and informed consent that have evolved through generations into nature-based solutions for the sustainable conservation of ecosystems.

Recognizing that plastics and climate change are inextricably linked particularly in their production and disposal, such as incineration, and reiterating that climate change is a top regional priority due to its disproportionately adverse impacts on human-environment relationships and biodiversity in the Pacific region.

Declare that we

Strongly support and urge all United Nations Member States at the Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to support the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to negotiate a new binding global agreement covering the whole life cycle of plastics.

² <https://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/binding-global-agreement-address-life-cycle-plastics>

Call for a new binding global agreement on the prevention and reduction of new marine litter and plastic pollution and management of plastic pollution already in our environment, to complement and expand on existing international instruments to cover the full life cycle of plastics.

Call for future discussions on this agreement to consider the need for financial and technical support mechanisms to adapt international science and best practice to the challenges specific to our region, as well as technology transfer and capacity building, and recall the United Nation's Environmental Assembly Resolution 2/11 calling on United Nations Member States to consider providing financial assistance in particular to Small Island Developing States to establish and implement necessary policies, regulatory frameworks and measures addressing plastic pollution.

Call for the future discussions on the agreement to consider implementation measures such as national plans and targets to be globally supported and coordinated as well as mechanisms for regular regional monitoring including identification of suitable regional indicator species, and reporting to support the Pacific region in meeting measurable marine litter and plastic pollution elimination targets.

Call for future discussions on the agreement to consider the need for elements such as a reduction of virgin plastic production, the phasing out of toxic and avoidable plastics, problematic and single-use plastic products and additives and the harmonization of design and labelling standards, to support transition to a safe circular global economy and to find alternatives to allow for our continued economic development.

Call on the international community to take urgent and immediate action to help us protect our region and peoples from further marine litter and plastic pollution impacts that threaten our marine ecosystems, marine species, our food security and our health.

Emphasize the need for accessible information and support to scientific research on plastics and plastic pollution data collection on waste plastics and material flows, as well as the development of marine litter and plastic pollution prevention best practice to inform robust evidence based and coherent policy.

Support ambitious policy implementation measures through mechanisms such as national plans, noting the role that private sector can play in helping drive solutions such as product stewardship, including extended producer responsibility and container deposit schemes.

Emphasize that Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations with their free prior and informed consent must be an integral part of the solution to the plastic pollution crisis.