

Communique
SPREP Environment Ministers' High-Level Talanoa 2021
Accelerating Actions for a Resilient Blue Pacific

At the Thirtieth SPREP Meeting's Environment Ministers and High-Level Representatives Talanoa held [virtually in Samoa] on Friday 10 September 2021, Environment Ministers and Ministerial Representatives adopted the following Communique:

We, the Environment Ministers, and High-Level Representatives of [.....]:

Reaffirm: The Pacific Ocean is the lifeblood of our society. It provides our cultural and historical identity since time immemorial and unites our islands in common purpose;

Note with alarm the unprecedented severity and frequency of threats the Pacific Ocean faces from climate change and human activities;

Restate our commitment to the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent;

Recognise that a resilient Blue Pacific is necessary to meet the extraordinary and unabating challenges of our times;

Commit to acting now to identify and accelerate actions in order to quickly build a resilient Blue Pacific;

and, in relation to the following topics-

1. Ocean and Climate Change

Note the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* in order to protect people, place and prospects of the *Blue Pacific* will reinforce the prioritisation of ocean and climate change considerations into all regional and national policies and plans, both public and private;

Reaffirm that the Pacific region's most important natural resource is the ocean, and its marine resources and ecosystems, which underpins our identity and community livelihoods;

Reiterate that our ocean plays a critical role in combating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and supporting sustainable development;

Reaffirm that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the Blue Pacific;

Urge all Parties to the UNFCCC to ensure that COP 26 advances the work on Oceans in the UNFCCC, recognising its centrality to the Blue Pacific Continent;

Support the Leaders' call for all Parties to the Paris Agreement to ensure that COP 26 concludes negotiation on the Paris Rulebook, delivers an outcome that promotes stronger transparency and pursues efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and mobilises scaled-up climate finance for adaptation from all sources, and reiterate our call in the Kainaki II Declaration for the international community to continue efforts towards meeting their climate finance commitment of US \$100 billion per year from a variety of sources and accelerate

support for the work of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts;

Applaud the Leaders' endorsement of the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment, which seeks to reduce the human and economic cost of severe weather, water and ocean events across Pacific Island communities, by strengthening national meteorological and hydrological organisations and their partnerships with national disaster management organisations.

2. Ocean and Pollution

Note that marine pollution - including plastics, nuclear waste, radioactive and other contaminants, hazardous and noxious substances, oil spills, World War II wrecks, other shipwrecks and unexploded ordnances - produces negative impacts on food security, human health, biodiversity, livelihoods and culture. Entire ecosystems and species are placed at risk as well as the people whose livelihoods and economic development depend on them;

Affirm that as the Blue Pacific, we are implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan 2018-2025, however, we recognise that the interconnectivity of the world's oceans means that marine pollution from land-based or ship-based sources, to be effectively addressed, requires the coordinated and effective involvement of all countries;

Urge Pacific Rim countries and Flag States to expeditiously implement relevant measures to prevent and effectively manage marine pollution and litter in accordance with international law;

Further note that plastic pollution endangers the health and resilience of nearly every marine ecosystem globally and Pacific Island Countries which contribute less than one percent of mismanaged plastics to the world's oceans are among those countries most severely affected;

Accordingly support the Pacific Islands Declaration on the Prevention of Plastic Pollution and its Impacts, attached in the Annex;

Also support the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, which aims to reduce additional pollution by maritime plastic litter to zero worldwide by 2050;

Call on governments to enter into negotiations regarding a global agreement on plastics pollution.

3. Ocean and Deep-Sea Mining

Acknowledge that countries have the sovereign right to develop their mineral resources according to their national priorities, and responsibilities regarding the exploitation of resources as described in the Rio Principles, and further acknowledging that mining activities should maximize social and economic benefits, but should not have negative environmental and social impacts;

Recognise that the ecology of the deep sea is poorly understood while the potentially negative and often irreversible impacts of mining are widely known;

Recall the commitment in the Future we Want (para 158), “to protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations, and to effectively apply an ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach in the management, in accordance with international law, of activities having an impact on the marine environment, to deliver on all three dimensions of sustainable development.”;

Further recall the appeal in 2019 by His Excellency Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy on Oceans, for a 10-year moratorium on Deep-seas Mining (DSM) in order to improve our scientific knowledge of deep-sea marine ecosystems which would substantially improve the basis for decision-making on DSM activities including avoidance and mitigation of impacts;

Note how this aligns with the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape: to “foster stewardship at scale – local, national, regional and international to ensure in perpetuity the health and wellbeing of our ocean and ourselves” and the Vemööre Declaration: “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”;

Recommend support for a 10-year moratorium on DSM by Pacific Island Countries in order to:

- i. improve our scientific knowledge of deep-sea marine ecosystems
- ii. enable a comprehensive assessment of environmental as well as social and economic risks
- iii. observe whether DSM can be implemented with effective management of the marine environment and ecosystems
- iv. ensure the International Seabed Authority applies a transparent, accountable, inclusive and environmentally responsible decision-making and regulatory process
- v. progress development of a global circular economy that ensures recycling of scarce mineral resources, particularly rare earth elements.

The Environment Ministers, and High-Level Representatives expressed their appreciation to the Secretariat for organising a successful Talanoa and SPREP Meeting.

Annex

DRAFT PACIFIC ISLANDS DECLARATION ON THE PREVENTION OF PLASTIC POLLUTION AND ITS IMPACTS

[PP0] *We*, representatives of the people of the Pacific islands and stewards of the world’s largest ocean, meeting at the **Environment Ministers and High-Level Representatives’ Talanoa**, 10th September 2021, are deeply concerned about the impacts of plastics and microplastics on our region and the ineffectiveness of the current patchwork of international legal instruments in preventing the acceleration of these impacts.

[PP1] *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 Convention on Biodiversity 1992, International Human Rights instruments, the

Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and the environmental principles notably the polluter-pays principle and the inter-generational equity principle.

[PP2] Further recalling the commitments made by 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 Vemööre Declaration 2020 and the Ocean Day Declaration on Plastic Pollution 2021.

[PP3] *Reiterating* our commitment to work to protect our Ocean from harmful plastics through the implementation of our regional strategy Cleaner Pacific 2025, the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter 2018-2025, and the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021 – 2025, notably its support for the development of a global legal framework to address marine litter.

[PP4] *Expressing* our grave concern about the environmental, social, cultural, economic, human health, food security and human rights impacts of plastics pollution at each stage of its life cycle on current and future generations.

[PP5] *Calling* specific attention to the fact that notwithstanding our globally negligible contribution to plastic pollution, we are grossly and disproportionately affected by its impacts, particularly considering that we do not extract fossil fuels nor produce plastics and their additives, and emphasizing the Second World Ocean Assessment stating that the highest recorded floating plastics are in the South Pacific subtropical gyre.

[PP6] *Underlining* that plastic pollution is a transboundary global issue and that we are the recipients of the pollution caused mostly by decisions of consumer goods companies and petrochemical industries located thousands of kilometres from our shores and carried to our islands by atmospheric and oceanic currents.

[PP7] *Deeply concerned* about the accelerating rate of plastics 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 environment.

[PP8] *Acknowledging* the actions taken to reduce and eliminate single use and problematic plastics in the region and the need for more ambitious global and regional policy frameworks including extended producer responsibility, container deposit systems and consumer awareness and responsibility.

[PP9] *Convinced* that despite some progress at national and regional levels, the plastic pollution crisis imposed upon us requires a dedicated and coordinated global and regional governance response with the support of all States and other institutional global and regional stakeholders.

[PP10] *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.

[PP11] *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 of guarding 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.

[PP12] *Stressing* the importance of incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations that have evolved through generations into nature-based solutions for the sustainable conservation of ecosystems.

[PP13] *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 in the Pacific Islands.

Declare that we

[OP1] *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 produce a new legally binding agreement covering the whole life cycle of plastics.

[OP2] *Call* for a new legally binding agreement on the prevention of plastic pollution, to complement and expand on existing international instruments to cover the full life cycle of plastics.

[OP3] *Call for* 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 Nations 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.

[OP4] *Call* for the future agreement to include National Plastic Pollution Prevention Plans and targets to be globally supported and coordinated as well as mechanisms for regular regional monitoring and reporting to support the Pacific islands region in meeting measurable plastic pollution elimination targets.

[OP5] *Call* for the future agreement to consider the need for global restrictions on plastic production including caps on the production of virgin plastics, the phasing out of toxic and avoidable plastics, 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.

[OP6] *Call on* the international community to take urgent and immediate action to help us protect our islands and peoples from further plastic pollution impacts that threaten our marine ecosystems, our food security and our health.

[OP7] *Emphasize* the need for accessible information and support to scientific research on plastics and plastic pollution, as well as the development of plastic pollution prevention best practice to inform robust and coherent policy.

[OP8] *Support* ambitious policy measures as part of National Plastic Pollution Prevention Plans, noting the role that private sector must play in helping drive solutions such as product stewardship, including extended producer responsibility and container deposit schemes.

[OP9] *Emphasize* that Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations must be an integral part of the solution to the plastics crisis.