

## First Executive Board Meeting

Apia, Samoa  
10-11 September 2018

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### **AGENDA ITEM 10.2.2: *Pacific Year of the Coral Reef 2018-2019***

#### **Purpose:**

1. To seek endorsement of the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef biennium 2018-2019.
2. To seek approval for development of Coral Reef Action Plan for 2020-2030.

#### **Background:**

3. In the Pacific region healthy ecosystems are an important source of resources and provide essential ecosystem services. For Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), social and economic resilience and climate change resilience depend on the sustainability of coral reefs. Coral reefs and their associated ecosystems (seagrass meadows and mangrove forests) play a key role in economies and societies in the region.
4. Coral reefs and their ecosystem services are threatened by the effects of sediment runoff, pollution, marine debris and micro-plastics, coastal development, overfishing, sea-level rise and rise in sea temperatures and 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 and severe El Niño events are evident, with mass bleaching events becoming more frequent and lasting longer than the before. US NOAA recently announced that the 2014-2017 global bleaching event 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 caused mass bleaching in several reefs that have 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 (NOAA Coral Reef Watch).

6. Some donor governments are responding to the urgency of the issue. Of particular relevance to the Pacific islands is the France-Australia Initiative for Coral Resilience, part of Franco-Australian cooperation adopted by the two countries in 2016. Under this initiative a commitment to support the resilience of coral ecosystems in the Pacific was launched and reaffirmed by the President of France on his visit to Australia in May 2018, and again during the high-level dialogue on climate change and biodiversity with Pacific Leaders held in Noumea in May 2018. This initiative is focused on understanding self-resilience parameters of coral reef ecosystems critical to inform the design of reef management and protection policies and action.
7. In April 2018 the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs announced Australia's commitment to AU\$5 million for a Coral Reef Innovation Facility that will develop and accelerate solutions to coral reef management challenges in developing countries. Areas of investment for the Coral Reef Innovation Facility will be defined in consultation with experts and partners towards innovative solutions to survey and assess the condition of coral reefs (including their socio-economic values such as fisheries, harvest and tourism use) to help improve coral reef management. This will include finding innovative and scalable solutions to facilitate recovery of damaged coral reefs, building future resilience and accelerating potential coral adaptation to increasing sea temperatures.
8. At their 31st General Meeting in 2016 in Paris, France, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) declared 2018 as the third International Year of the Reef (IYOR). This was based on the understanding that coral reefs are one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet as a result of both climate change and other anthropogenic pressures, and the recognition that awareness of this among the general public, as well as decision-makers and civil society, is still insufficient to bring about the required policy, regulatory and public behavioural changes for coral reef conservation. ICRI is an informal partnership between nations and organizations which strives to conserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world.
9. SPREP has responded to the global call by dedicating 2018-2019 as the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef. Key outputs over the 2018-2019 biennium are:
  - Development of a Regional Coral Reef Action Plan 2020-2030.
  - Developing focused project proposals with donors and partners to implement coral reef conservation and management action.
  - Promoting collaborative partnerships between governments, the private sector, academia and civil society on the management of coral reefs.
  - Promoting Pacific Year of the Coral Reef products, activities and events.
10. The proposed Regional Coral Reef Action Plan 2020-2030 will encompass the following initiatives and issues:
  - Promoting integrated management of coastal and marine areas to reduce anthropogenic pressures on coral reef ecosystems and to increase coral resilience.

- Increasing capacity for coral reef management and related ecosystems, along with best practices amongst all stakeholders.
- Supporting regional, national and sub-national legislation, policy and management for coral reef conservation.
- Integrating traditional knowledge and customary practices into coral reef management
- Seek sustainable financing and resources.
- Implementing a communication strategy and increase information and awareness.
- Increasing the accessibility of research and monitoring data and results for the benefit of coral reef conservation.

**Recommendations:**

11. The Executive Board is invited to:

- **endorse** the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef biennium 2018-2019 and the scope of proposed activities ; and
- **approve** the proposal for a Regional Coral Reef Action Plan for 2020-2030.

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16 August, 2018