




PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

# Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement 2021



PICTURE: SPC

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1. We, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders, representing the Blue Pacific and its peoples, are committed to strong regional action, harnessing shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and acting as one Blue Pacific Continent. With 96 per cent of our region being Ocean, the Ocean is at the heart of our geography, our cultures and our economies.
  2. Starting in 2021, we will be guided by a new *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* in order to protect people, place and prospects of the *Blue Pacific*. It is envisaged that this new strategy will reinforce the prioritisation of ocean and climate change considerations into all regional and national policies and plans, both public and private.
  3. We recognise the impacts and ongoing challenges that COVID-19 has imposed on our region and its Ocean-driven economic sectors. The pandemic has led to major disruptions, reinforcing the need for the Blue Pacific and the international community to renew ambition and action on the Ocean at national, regional and global levels, including towards recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 that advances the goals of the Paris Agreement.
  4. The potential of the Ocean to meet sustainable development needs is enormous; but only if our oceans can be restored and maintained to a healthy and productive state. Ongoing trends of exploitation and degradation of marine ecosystems show that not only have endeavors to date been insufficient, but risks are increasing every day. More must be done to protect our Ocean as it provides solutions to some of our existential challenges such as climate change.
  5. As custodians of the Blue Pacific, we have demonstrated our leadership and collective resolve to protect the Pacific Ocean. It is our endowment fund, inherited from our ancestors and which we share with future generations. We must care for, invest in and nurture the Ocean to continue to benefit from it.

### *Recommitting to our regional ocean policies*

6. We reaffirm our commitment to sustainably manage, use and conserve our Ocean and its resources, as one Blue Pacific, guided by our regional commitments and policy instruments.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Namely: Vemööre Declaration: Commitments to Nature Conservation Action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021 – 2025; 2019 Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now; 2018 Boe Declaration for Regional Security; 2016 Pohnpei Ocean Statement: A Course to Sustainability; and 2014 Palau Declaration on The Ocean: Life and Future and regional policy instruments: 2010 Framework for Pacific Oceanscape; 2002 Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Framework for Integrated Strategic Action Policy; the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, 2021 – 2025; Regional Action Plan: Marine Litter; Cleaner Pacific 2025 Strategy; Framework for Pacific Regionalism; Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific; and Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries.

## *Ocean advocacy and engagement*

7. We affirm Forum Foreign Ministers' decision to prioritise sustainable ocean management, use and conservation for the Forum's international engagement and advocacy. As we come together for the 2<sup>nd</sup> UN Ocean Conference (2UNOC), the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), the Our Ocean Conference, and 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP26), and as we enter the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021 – 2030 and the UN Decade on Ecosystems Restoration 2021 - 2030, we must collectively enhance our understanding of the ocean; strengthen the ocean science and policy interface, and focus on effective implementation of all commitments made and go further, to ensure a thriving Ocean now, and for the future. We note the important role of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner on advocacy and attention to Ocean priorities, decisions and processes, including to monitor and report on progress in the implementation of regional Ocean commitments.
8. We acknowledge Palau's role as host of the 7<sup>th</sup> Our Ocean Conference in 2021, and recognise that hosting this conference and other international events in our Blue Pacific region provides a critical opportunity to showcase regional leadership, build partnerships and raise ambitious action-oriented solutions.



## *Biodiversity*

9. We note the global biodiversity crisis and emphasise the importance of having strong Ocean governance in place both within, and beyond, national jurisdictions of countries of the Blue Pacific, to ensure the holistic and sustainable management of the Ocean.

10. We support global action to develop and implement the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This framework, along with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, will provide further momentum to holistically safeguard our rich biodiversity.



PICTURE: SPC


11. We strive for the expeditious finalisation, adoption and entry into force of an international legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ) that establishes a robust and ambitious framework to conserve and sustainably use our marine biodiversity. This framework must be based on the best available scientific information and relevant traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities; taking into account the precautionary approach; recognising the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States; recognising the special interests and roles of coastal states; and taking into account cumulative impacts of activities, as well as of climate change, without undermining existing relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional and sectoral bodies.

### *Urgent climate change action*

12. We call for urgent action to reduce and prevent the irreversible impacts of climate change on our Ocean, reiterating that climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Blue Pacific.

We also note with significant concern, that based on current trends we will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius as early as 2030 unless urgent action is taken, with significant adverse impacts on the Ocean. The recognition of the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus entails that the protection of one cannot be at the expense of the other, and that radical ambition is required. This should include meeting or exceeding nationally determined contributions (NDCs), formulating mid-century low emissions development strategies in 2020 and may include commitment and strategies to achieve net zero carbon by 2050.

13. We welcome the convening of the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue, which considered how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action in this context, including through consideration of developing a work program on Ocean within the UNFCCC.


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14. We call for increased investment for the establishment of observation systems, to understand impacts of climate change on the Ocean, blue carbon protection and restoration initiatives for climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as monitoring and prediction to strengthen natural disaster response and risk reduction strategies for our islands. The international community must meet the global climate finance commitment of at least USD 100 billion per year by 2020 from a variety of sources to invest in climate action in developing countries. This investment should be transparently accounted for in its provision and implementation. This should also include exploring innovative financing options and mechanisms for the Ocean.

### *Securing the Blue Pacific*

15. Recognising the strategic importance and value of the Ocean and its peaceful use, we reaffirm our commitment to the rules-based international order founded on the UN Charter, adherence to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and resolution of international disputes by peaceful means.
16. Securing the limits of the Blue Pacific Continent against the threats of sea-level rise and climate change is the defining issue underpinning the full realisation of the Blue Pacific Continent. We are committed to concluding outstanding maritime boundaries claims and zones, including related treaties and legal frameworks to support the sustainable development and ensure the peace and security of our Blue Pacific Continent not only from environment threats but also from external geo-strategic interests. We are also committed to a collective effort, including to develop international law, with that aim of ensuring that once a Forum Member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with the 1982 *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*, the Member's maritime zones cannot be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change.

### *Conservation and sustainable management of the ocean and its resources*

17. We commit to responsibly and effectively manage 100% of the Blue Pacific Ocean within and beyond national jurisdiction to ensure its health, productivity, resilience and safety, based on the best available scientific information and traditional knowledge. This includes taking into account ecological and cultural connectivity when designating and establishing conservation and management measures and areas-based management measures including marine protected areas.
18. We are committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of the *Blue Pacific's* fisheries resources currently being compromised by Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, harmful fisheries subsidies, climate change, low level of value-adding of tuna in the region and marine pollution recognising its centrality to the wellbeing of communities and economies, and as guided by our *Regional Fisheries Roadmap*. Revenues from tuna fisheries provide much needed income for Forum Island members. The industry also provides over 22,000 jobs across the region. COVID-19 and its impact on sectors such



as tourism, has increased the importance of fisheries resources for Forum Island members, both in terms of economic returns and for food security.

19. We call for the increased use of technology, to address threats to the long-term sustainability of fisheries resources and the associated impacts on the social and economic well-being of our people. We call for increased investment in coastal and marine ecosystem restoration and management capacities, sustainable aquaculture development and research activities. Investment is needed for the future of sustainable coastal and marine tourism, economic resilience of fisheries, and community-level economic uplift and food security. We call for focused investment and capacity building towards retaining the traditional knowledge of sustainable fishing practices for future generations of Pacific people.

### *Maritime connectivity and renewable energy*

20. Recognising that the Blue Pacific's maritime transport industry plays a critical role, we call for the sustainable and resilient development of the maritime industry, including investment in new technology and operations, to ensure safe, accessible, efficient and affordable maritime transport which contributes to the International Maritime Organizations decarbonisation strategy and a quieter maritime sector.
21. We are committed to promote partnerships that provide incentives for investment in sustainable ocean-based renewable energy – for new economic opportunities and energy security.

### *Combatting marine pollution*

22. Marine pollution, of all kinds, produces negative ecological and socio-economic impacts including plastics; nuclear waste, radioactive and other contaminants; World War II wrecks and other shipwrecks; and unexploded ordnances. Marine pollution puts entire ecosystems and species at risk in addition to the people who depend on them for livelihood and economic development. Plastic pollution is a planetary threat affecting nearly every marine and freshwater ecosystem globally. Members contribute less than 1.3 percent of the mismanaged plastics in the world's oceans but are one of the main recipients.
23. As the Blue Pacific, we have developed and implemented a regional action plan on marine litter (2018-2025) as part of the *Cleaner Pacific 2025* strategy. However, we recognise the interconnectivity of the world's oceans means that marine pollution requires the involvement of all countries and people to be effectively addressed. We call on Pacific Rim countries to expeditiously implement relevant measures to prevent and effectively manage marine pollution and litter, including through land-based sources, in accordance with international law. The most effective control measures remain prevention and avoiding waste generation. We further call on governments to ensure that appropriate global mechanisms are in place to enable the transformation of the global plastics economy.

## *Access to development finance and blue recovery*

24. Achieving the objectives of the Blue Pacific requires increased levels of development and other sources of finance for the Ocean. It also requires strengthening of enabling environments at all levels, including institutional and human capacity building at the national level and promoting access to science, knowledge, infrastructure, technology and innovation that is open and responsive to the specificities and challenges of our region.

25. We call on greater collaboration with development partners to improve economic recovery efforts and the formation of a sustainable ocean economy in response to COVID-19 pandemic challenges. We call for the development of innovative financing mechanisms, to mobilise financial resources to improve the amount and efficacy of finance to effectively implement ocean governance objectives in the region.

26. We call on global financing institutions, including the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility and Adaptation Fund, to increase investments on oceans and climate change. Further, we call on the international community to identify innovative start-ups as champions to help address development challenges; and promote sustainable and innovative solutions, including implementing ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change, to further develop and advance regional COVID-19 recovery efforts.



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27. The Ocean is our past, our present, our future. By deepening collective responsibility and accountability for the stewardship of the Ocean, we can protect our people, place and prospects and secure the future of our Blue Pacific Continent.

