



Statement by Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Deputy Prime Minister,  
11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Pacific Community on Oceans and Sustainable  
Development  
21 June 2019, Noumea, New Caledonia

Chairman  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentleman

In the words of the late Epli Hauofa “Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean,.....”

*The Blue Pacific* identity reinforces the potential of shared ownership of the Pacific Ocean and reaffirms the connection of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment and livelihoods. It aims to harness our shared ocean identity, geography and resources to drive positive socio-cultural, political and economic development. Therefore securing the wellbeing and potential of the Blue Pacific is at the centre of our regional agenda.

### **Importance of the Oceans for Pacific**

The Pacific Ocean has provided our island communities their cultural and historical identity and attachment since time immemorial. Pacific peoples rely on the ocean for food, income, culture, and recreation that are so important to the Pacific way of life. The OCEAN is core and central to our way of life.

With our large Pacific Ocean it also means we are custodians of some of the world's richest biodiversity and marine resources. We recognise that this natural endowment is our greatest asset that must be sustainably managed for the benefit of our present and future generations. Therefore as guardians of the largest portion of the Pacific Ocean, our committed leadership as the Blue Pacific matters.

The Blue Pacific recognises the geostrategic, economic, cultural and ecological importance of the world's largest ocean continent as well as the importance of securing the wellbeing and potential of the Pacific Ocean. This calls for inspired leadership, and a long term commitment to maintaining a strong and collective voice and action on issues vital to our Blue Pacific continent such as we have done for current ocean governance arrangements, establishing a ban on driftnet fishing, lobbying for a stand alone SDG Goal 14 on Oceans, the 2017 UN oceans conference and reaching global consensus for the Paris Agreement.

## Climate change and Oceans

Despite our best efforts to sustainably manage the ocean, climate-change driven impacts such as ocean acidification are among a number of serious threats to the health and resilience of our shared ocean.

The recent IPCC Special 1.5 Report shows that a 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming **is a limit for everyone**. From extreme weather events to sea level rise, from slowed economic growth to biodiversity loss, the report speaks to the risks of exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius. For our blue Pacific continent, it is an existential threat for many of the Pacific's low lying atolls.

The coral reefs that provide about 70% of the protein in the diet of Pacific Islanders and that help provide protection to at coastal dwellers will be severely degraded at 1.5°C of warming. Healthy coral reefs attract tourism, which is a key industry that generates USD 4 billion for Pacific Island countries. Ocean warming can mean huge losses in revenue, a turnover in species composition and changes in migration patterns of fish stocks. These impacts are already felt in our region.

We know from science knowledge the critical role played by the Ocean in regulating the Climate being one of the major sinks of carbon sequestration and storage.

We are reminded of the need for continual investment on research for data and information. These shall be promoted and enforced given the little knowledge on the ocean thus, we have limited policies for its effective management. Samoa is joining other countries in partnerships with IUCN to look at Marine Spatial Planning to collect the necessary data and as a tool for management.

## Oceans in the UNFCCC process

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, as Pacific countries:

- we are pleased to know that COP 25 in Chile will be designated the Blue COP;
- we are pushing to raise climate ambition in the achievement of our new goals that will among other issues, enhance coastal blue carbon mitigation including clean domestic marine transport; enhance the resilience of ocean ecosystems and ocean-based communities and economies; and support scientific observation and research on the ocean-climate nexus; and
- continue advocacy for Oceans to become an integral part of the continuing climate change agenda and the UNFCCC platform.

## Oceans action at regional level

The importance of ocean science is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals, and is time critical in the face of climate change impacts that threaten the very existence of the Blue Pacific.

The sustainable management of the Pacific region, the only ‘ocean continent’ on earth, and the region’s advocacy at a global level require accessible, fit-for-purpose technical information; the same ocean-related information that underpins, reinforces and progresses the Blue Pacific identity.

An integrated regional approach to multidisciplinary ocean-related scientific studies and partnerships with international and regional partners in ocean science will be critical in ensuring a sustainable future for the Blue Pacific.

**In this regard Samoa supports the recommendations towards** the development of a regional strategy for the collection of scientific and technical ocean data and information to translate the Blue Pacific narrative into regional, national and local action for sustainable management of the Pacific Ocean.

We see this portfolio of issues as fitting for the SPC to manage from the collection of data to interpretation of datasets and for the CROP agencies to implement activities in this context.

Coordination is essential in this regard therefore an integrated approach to ocean-focused activities, both at the agency level through the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science, and at the CROP level through the Marine Sector Working Group, with the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner and other partnerships is the best option for us to take.

### **Samoa - National Oceans Action**

- At the UN Ocean Conference that focused on the implementation of SDG14 on Ocean, Samoa made 13 voluntary commitments which included:
  - development and implementation of the Samoa Ocean strategy;
  - solid waste management efforts; approaches to address land-based pollution through river and coastal health ecosystem monitoring, plus policies and projects to manage plastics marine litter;
  - we encouraged community involvement in fisheries and coastal infrastructure management plans that also assist to build resilience and adapt to impacts of climate change; and
  - we committed to ensuring improved scientific information and knowledge for more informed policy making on fisheries issues and prohibiting the use of destructive fishing methods in Samoa’s fishery waters.
  
- In support of healthy ocean ecosystems Samoa has restricted the importation of plastic bags since the introduction of the Plastic Bag Prohibition on Importation Regulations 2006:
  - we have enforced a ban on single use plastic bags and plastic straws which took effect from January 2019; and
  - styrofoam food containers and cups will be banned once environmentally friendly options have been identified and are in use.

- The consultations processes on the Samoa Ocean Strategy are well underway with the Strategy to be finalised by September 2019:
  - the Samoa Ocean Strategy (SOS) 2020-2030 will guide and track Samoa's goals for integrated planning and management of its ocean domain, including marine inland waters, territorial sea, EEZ and seabed for the coming decade. It will also serve as an integration tool to foster implementation of Samoa's international and regional commitments related to the ocean.
- Furthermore we are making progress in the determination and negotiation of our maritime boundaries with our neighbours Tonga, NZ/Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna/France, and the United States/American Samoa. This is a priority directive by Pacific Leaders.
- We are actively engaged in discussions for the protection of possible areas beyond national jurisdiction for marine biodiversity.

Thank you for your attention.

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