

Palau Declaration on ‘The Ocean: Life and Future’

Charting a course to sustainability

Importance of the Ocean to us

1. As Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, we have and will continue to play a central role in the stewardship of one of the greatest natural endowments in the world – the Pacific Ocean. It is the lifeblood of our economies and societies and is crucial to global climatic and environmental stability. It is the fabric of unity upon which we have woven individual and collective relationships and agreements on sustainable development, now and into the future. The Ocean is our Life and our Future. The people of the Pacific Ocean are a living testament to that truth. Our way of life, our culture, our direction and our actions should reflect that truth, as it is our very identity: People of the Ocean.

2. The well-being of our Pacific people remains the central point of reference and convergence for our efforts to sustainably develop, manage and conserve our Pacific Ocean and its resources. This is made all the more important as many of our countries are faced with: increased dependency on imported foods; a growing Non-Communicable Disease crisis in Pacific communities; slow to moderate economic growth rates; high transport costs; fossil fuel dependency; growing urbanization; growing population rates and adverse impacts from climate change. The health and productivity of the Pacific Ocean is significant for all of these development challenges, now and into the future.

Threats to the Ocean and populations

3. In our life time, a dangerous combination of human impacts has come to threaten the foundation of our Pacific livelihoods, which centers largely on the Pacific Ocean, and indeed those of the rest of the world. Over harvesting and overfishing, dangerous fishing practices and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU), damaging extractive industries, pollution, invasive species, coastal runoff, and other stressors (both local and exogenous) have weakened the resilience of many marine ecosystems and constitute a massive threat to the health and productivity of the ocean and its resources. Compounding these pressures, global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are contributing to ocean warming, more frequent and extreme weather events, sea level rise and acidification and potential loss of territories present the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific and one of the greatest challenges for the entire world. The implications of these challenges to the populations of the Pacific are very significant and must be addressed.

4. IUU fishing robs the Pacific of its development opportunities, reduces revenue from fisheries, undermines investment and employment opportunities and threatens the sustainability of fish stocks. A growing number of marine protected areas and conservation initiatives implemented in the region have significant opportunity costs largely borne by Forum Island countries themselves. Effectively implementing marine protected areas will provide global and regional benefits.

Lifting accountability across Ocean development

5. The outcome of Rio+20 Conference, *The Future We Want*, placed Oceans as central to sustainable development, stressing the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas, and of their resources, to sustainable development through their contributions to poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, food security and creation of sustainable livelihoods and decent work, while at the same time protecting biodiversity and the marine environment and addressing the impacts of climate change. It further called for the establishment of global sustainable development goals (SDG).

6. The Forum membership took a strong position on the importance of having a comprehensive stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal on Oceans complemented by comprehensive national, regional and international commitments and action as a key part of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and as central elements of our priorities as we prepare for the 3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa, 1 - 4 September 2014.

7. Leaders and communities have developed and are implementing many significant local, national, sub-regional, regional and international initiatives across all aspects of sustainable Ocean management. To this end, as a comprehensive regional umbrella framework, Forum Leaders approved the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy (PIROP) in 2002 and towards its reinvigorated commitment and implementation, endorsed the ‘Our Sea of Islands – Our Livelihoods – Our Oceania: a Framework for Pacific Oceanscape’ in 2010. These holistic Pacific Ocean policy frameworks for sustainable development are underpinned by some of the world’s most advanced regional multilateral organizations and processes.

Integrated and Mixed Management Approach

8. These umbrella frameworks stress the fact that the sustainable development, management and conservation of the Ocean can only be achieved through integrated and **mixed management approaches** to maximize benefits for our people and conserving our Ocean assets for future generations. This approach recognizes jurisdictional rights, fosters good ocean governance, encourages sustained action and facilitates adaptation to a rapidly changing environment. It also recognizes that what works best for one community or country may not work best and may not be possible in another – and in spite of our different approaches, we are fundamentally working towards the same objective – responsible and sustainable development of our Ocean and its resources.

A call to Action

9. We call on regional and global partners, including civil society and the private sector to work with members and the Forum Fisheries Agency to evaluate and implement appropriate solutions to address IUU and associated significant loss of fisheries earnings to Pacific Island countries. Accordingly, we welcome the entry into force of the Niue Treaty on Cooperation in Fisheries Surveillance and Law Enforcement in the South Pacific Region which provides for enhanced regional coordination and cooperation in fisheries surveillance and law enforcement,

for example through the sharing of fisheries data and intelligence and cross-vesting of fisheries enforcement personnel amongst parties.

10. We call for strengthened regional efforts to fix baselines and maritime boundaries to ensure that the impact of climate change and sea level rise does not result in reduced jurisdiction.

11. We call for members to ensure that, where appropriate, effective environmental impact assessments are undertaken and incorporated into approval processes for any extractive activities in the Pacific Ocean, and where necessary, the precautionary principle is applied. We further call for fisheries and extractive industries, stakeholders and States operating in the region to take on the responsibility to contribute to the rehabilitation of the Ocean and its resources.

12. We call on the global community to support the efforts of Forum Island countries to sustainably conserve their Ocean resources and explore ways to share costs and avoid a disproportionate burden on Forum Island countries.

13. We support a decision in favour of launching negotiations by September 2015 for an International Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

14. Taking ‘leadership through action’ promoted by the 44th PIF Majuro Declaration as our inspiration, we have prepared a list of current and proposed initiatives and commitments on the ocean taken by Forum member States. Those initiatives are listed with this declaration and serve as a basis and an inspiration for future integrated management approaches, actions and commitments by PIF nations as well as other nations and regional and international partners and institutions. These actions should assist to foster further implementation and accountability towards the achievement of the Post-2015 Development agenda and associated SDG on Oceans and Seas.

15. We call on the office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, with the support of the Pacific Ocean Alliance, to build on the actions listed with this Declaration and maintain a more comprehensive ongoing register of initiatives and relevant data and information across the spectrum of the Pacific Ocean as a basis for promoting and monitoring the sustainable development of our Ocean and fostering integrated management approaches, where appropriate. This register should assist in reducing individual country reporting in the long term and help to facilitate the necessary collective reporting from this region towards global monitoring efforts under the SDG on Oceans and Seas and the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

16. This Declaration will be presented by the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum to the Secretary-General of the United Nations as a contribution to the global effort to support a comprehensive, effective and implementable stand-alone Oceans Sustainable Development Goal and to the preservation of our Pacific Ocean.