1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management Outcomes Document

The Inaugural Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management was held from 11 – 15 September 2023 in Nadi, Fiji. The Conference was attended by over 210 Pacific Ocean managers, ocean scientists, indigenous and local knowledge specialists, Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs), media representatives, and development partners from 26 countries[1], including 17 Pacific Island countries and territories. In the context of this document, the "Ocean" refers to all salt water marine environments of the global ocean, including coastal and oceanic spaces.

The objectives of the 1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management were to:

- Identify, discuss, and prioritise ocean science and management priorities in the Pacific with all relevant country stakeholders and partners.
- Provide a platform for Pacific scientists to showcase their work and prioritise key scientific focuses and scientific questions.
- Take stock of the current situation of integrated ocean management in Pacific Island Countries and Territories and develop a shared understanding and way forward.
- Share on practical implications and examples of integrating traditional knowledge to science project and ocean management.
- Discuss the implementation of the Ocean Decade in the Pacific and what it should look like.

We, the Conference participants, acknowledge all speakers who addressed the following crucial topics relevant to the Pacific region and beyond:

- Ocean policy and management initiatives, at local and national level, including financing mechanisms.
- Traditional knowledge, practices and governance.
- Advances and collaborations in ocean science, including coastal, open ocean, fisheries and climate science.
- Capacity strengthening and engagement of communities, media, and early career Ocean professionals.
- Advancements of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in the Pacific region.

Within these topics, the following are the priority areas that were identified by participants who attended the Conference, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy, and other relevant regional frameworks.

[1] American Samoa, Australia, Brazil, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Germany, Japan, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Spain, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

We, the Conference participants, acknowledge and recognise the following:

Traditional ocean knowledge, practices and governance

The importance of respecting and recognizing traditional governance and the indigenous wisdom in our coastal communities.

That traditional knowledge, as a form of ocean science, is a paramount component of traditional ocean governance and must be preserved, promoted and used.

The need for a coordinated and systematic approach to documenting and applying relevant traditional knowledge, understanding that traditional knowledge is sensitive and protocols and legislations need to be put in place to govern the collection, access, and application of relevant traditional knowledge.

The need to incorporate traditional knowledge and practices, combined with ocean science, into ocean governance and management, and recognizing such knowledge in accountability and reporting processes.

The need for different disciplines of science to work together, despite challenges in collaboration, particularly natural, social and sustainability sciences.

The importance of promoting traditional knowledge of sailing, navigation and wayfinding and inclusion of women navigators as a new shift in traditional navigation.

Ocean policy and management

The importance for Governments to co-design and formulate policies, plans and projects in collaboration with coastal communities, civil society, private sector partners, and stakeholders from all sectors.

The need to incorporate policies into national development plans and strategies is critical as well as ensuring sustainability and domestication of regional projects in national plans.

That because multiple actors (from national, to sub-regional and regional levels) are involved in formulating policies concerning the oceans, its functional uses or management, it is necessary to task the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) to exercise an oversight role on ocean-related policy formulation to ensure that such policies are coherent, complement each other and are aligned to implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy).

The need for effective coordination and collaboration on marine spatial planning, with the numerous technical partners involved. Regional organisations should support national governments by establishing a coordination mechanism with technical partners to better coordinate support on marine spatial planning.

There should be some focus and attention given to port development and port management studies. Hydrography surveys of port areas should be undertaken to ensure that any port development should consider the marine habitats of the port areas before any port infrastructures
are conducted.

There is need for more studies on the activities of maritime transport, especially shipping, to better understand the impact of shipping on ocean ecosystems and resources considering the global maritime decarbonation agenda and the push for blue shipping to complement blue economy and blue fishing.

The importance of including maritime transport in ocean policies and ocean management initiatives, including the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan, and the alignment of the proposed One-Maritime Framework with the 2050 Implementation Plan.

The need for policy, management and funding initiatives to recognise the intrinsic value of ocean resources and ocean information to the societies and economies of Pacific Island nations.

The need and importance of progressing ocean-related policies implementation (e.g., ocean policies, fisheries) through sufficient resourcing (recurrent operational budget and staffing) and multi-sectoral involvement.

The need to recognise the evolution of regional (and national) coastal fisheries policies from control to co-management with local communities and it is important for donors and international partners strive to support and enhanced the progress made by building their ambition on these policies and work with regional Pacific organisation and national actors as the prime coordinating agents for funding and resource distribution.

The need to recognise that Pacific Island country and territory Fisheries Agencies (especially at sub-national level) and local communities carry the full burden of managing coastal fisheries, including coastal marine protected areas, therefore, they should be the focus of current and future funding support.

The need to regularly assess the implementation of national ocean policies and their social, environmental, and economic impacts.

The importance of ocean accounting to integrate data systematically and coherently across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, enabling spatial and temporal comparisons and the production of policy-relevant indicators for decision-making aiming at sustainable development.

The need to establish or strengthen national data management policies and governance mechanisms.

The need to collectively address human-rights related issues in Pacific fisheries (industrial and coastal or small-scale), among other ocean management challenges.

Capacity strengthening and community involvement

The recognition of "nothing about us without us" as a guiding principle for local community involvement.

The recognition of youth as important stakeholders to meaningfully engage in ocean initiatives.

The need for capacity strengthening and career development opportunities in ocean science and ocean management for Pacific Island youth and early career ocean professionals.

The recognition of specific needs of women, children and other people with special needs when developing capacity strengthening activities to support them in their roles in ocean stewardship.

The need to involve local communities and support local capacity for ocean monitoring and management.

The need for stronger and genuine partnerships to support capacity development.

The importance of open, accessible, actionable and findable data, improving transparency and agency in Pacific Island countries and territories.

The need for a more balanced approach in regional assistance, as assistance should be fairly and equitably distributed to national governments. Technical assistance opportunities should be clearly provided to governments in the region and regional skills, knowledge and resources should be used and invested in the region to build capacities within the region.

Science and decision support system

The continuous need to use existing data and the importance of undertaking more baseline and monitoring data collection, ocean modelling, and forecasting.

The need for interdisciplinary research and diverse approaches to achieve a better understanding of the ocean.

The importance of standardised methodologies, interoperability of data, and collaboration with other research institutions to avoid duplication and to improve the relevance and sustainability of ocean science products.

The involvement of local communities in guiding priority research areas, collecting, interpreting, and sharing of data, as well as being informed of research results, as it contributes to the accountability and relevance of ocean science and sustainable fisheries management.

The importance of free, prior, and informed consent when involving communities in research initiatives, along the lines of the FAIR and CARE principles, including when sharing data.

The need to respect and promote the role of governmental mechanisms set up to better coordinate marine scientific research (e.g., Marine Scientific Research Committee or equivalent structures).

The central role that data custodians play in proactively making data available and accessible.

The importance of transforming data into simplified actionable information for decision-makers.

Communicating ocean science, traditional knowledge and ocean management

The need for more effective engagement and collaboration with the Pacific media on ocean science and ocean management.

The need for effective communications within governments and with diverse partner groups and communities when progressing ocean management initiatives, including marine spatial planning processes.

The need to create spaces for partnership that include storytelling to ensure greater awareness of ocean and environment-related stories so Pacific people are kept abreast of developments.

The need to provide opportunities for funding and resources (training, story grants) to build capacity and capabilities for science literacy within media and encourage media content empowering greater visibility of ocean related stories.

The development of communications and advocacy strategy that aims at bridging the information divide between national and provincial governments and local communities.

The need to craft appropriate, simple, timely, and effective messaging when communicating on ocean issues.

Financing Ocean Science and Ocean Management

The need for coordinated sustainable financing for countries and territories to be aligned with regional national ocean-related policies and priorities and provide tangible way for Pacific Island countries and territories to implement National Ocean Policies.

The need to shift away from short-term, pilot project-focused funding to prioritise sustainable long-term predictable financing.

The need to address the capacity gap in ocean finance and to embed finance specialists into ocean management initiatives.

The need for global-level initiatives and decision-making to recognise community impacts and feedback.

The need for investment in capacity strengthening and mentorship initiatives.

The need for transparency around financing, tracking financial flows and assessing the impact of investments.

The importance of increasing coordinated investments and ongoing investments in human resources, operations, research infrastructures, equipment, and technology to generate more ocean knowledge.

The need for financing mechanisms and systems that can address emerging ocean issues and integrate new innovative financing modalities.

The need for transparent and structured data and indicators underpinning risk assessment and reporting, which are critical to scale-up finance.

Advancing the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in the region

The importance of developing and implementing a living Roadmap for the Ocean Decade in the Pacific that reflects the Conference Outcomes and that sets out a shared vision for the Decade in the Pacific, priority actions, and key enabling factors needed for its successful implementation.

The need to further develop the Draft Ocean Decade Roadmap developed at the Conference as a basis for consulting and engaging national and regional stakeholders (communities, policy-makers, private sector, civil society, regional organisations, etc.) with a view to finalise the Roadmap by the time of the International Ocean Decade Conference in April 2024.

The critical role of the Decade Collaborative Centre hosted by SPC to advance the implementation of the Ocean Decade in the Pacific Islands region in the framework of the Roadmap and to foster new and coordinate Decade Actions, to identify gaps and needs of the region, to foster partnerships, and to mobilise resources towards the implementation of transformative ocean science solutions.

There is need for a balanced approach to using knowledge and scientific studies produced by universities from the Pacific. Case studies of uptake of ocean science from the region should also be disseminated to as many Pacific Island countries and territories as possible.

The way forward

Over the next year, engage regional leaders, the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, and heads of regional organisations of the Pacific to endorse the Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management concept and supplement the Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management final day with an "Ocean Inter-Ministerial Meeting."

***

This Outcomes Document was shared with and reviewed by all participants to the 1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management, representing 210 people from 110 organisations from 26 countries, including 17 Pacific Island countries and territories.

We express our deep appreciation to the Na Momo na Tui Nadi, the people of Saunaka, the Ba Regional Council, the Director of Fiji Fisheries, Ms Neomai Wati Ravitu, the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, Dr. Filimon Manoni, and the Government and people of Fiji for their hospitality.

-