

31st SPREP Meeting : The Chair's Summary

8 September 2023.

Taumeasina Island Resort.

Apia, Samoa



Sustainable, transformative and resilient for a Blue Pacific

THE CHAIR'S SUMMARY

(8 September 2023)

WELCOME ADDRESS: SAMOA

1. **Purpose of the gathering** to listen, learn, and share, underscoring the importance of taking key insights back to Pacific nations to continue the role as custodians of the environment and oceans in light of the Pacific's vulnerability.
2. **Forging stronger alliances** to prevent reaching the critical threshold of a 1.5-degree Celsius temperature increase. The importance of setting ambitious goals, such as the 30 by 30 pledges and working on the global mechanisms required to secure USD 20 million to USD 100 million in funding for the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
3. **Take actions at the local level** urging Members to take personal action to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution in their homes, offices, and constituencies, emphasising the importance of the 3Rs: reducing, reusing, and recycling. Also planting trees to reduce emissions, transitioning to renewable energy, and implementing other mitigation and adaptation measures.
4. **Financial resources** to ensure they are made available to the region and used to build capacity and resources for both national and regional plans, is a critical step.
5. **Sincerity in commitment**, underscoring the importance of "walking the talk." The agenda for the Meeting outlined as an opportunity to encourage participants to reflect on their individual and national actions and to collectively convey the needs and aspirations of the "Blue Pacific Continent" to the world.

GLOBAL SCENE SETTING: UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

6. **Addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution** is closely linked to the health of people and planet. A healthy environment is a prerequisite and a foundation for economic prosperity, human health, and wellbeing.
7. **Climate risks are rising as global warming accelerates.** Despite a call for strengthened Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2030, progress since COP26 in Glasgow has been inadequate. To get on track to meet the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5 degree Celsius target, the world needs to reduce greenhouse gases by unprecedented levels.

8. **Biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate and the pressures driving this decline are intensifying.** Over one million species are threatened with extinction, while the number of invasive alien species per country has risen by about 70 percent since 1970, and 75 percent of land and two thirds of oceans on earth has been significantly altered by humans.
9. **Plastic pollution is a global problem** and every year 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste leaks into aquatic ecosystems, polluting lakes, rivers and seas. Plastic pollution can alter habitats and natural processes, reducing ecosystems' ability to adapt to climate change, directly affecting millions of people's livelihoods, food production capabilities and social well-being.

REGIONAL SCENE SETTING: SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

10. **SPREP was established through the foresight of Pacific leaders by Treaty in 1993 to address the environmental challenges of the Pacific region.** Its mandate to promote co-operation in the Pacific region and provide assistance in order to protect and improve its environment and to ensure sustainable development for present and future generations. 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of this key milestone for the region. SPREP grew from the UN Regional Seas Programme for the Pacific originally housed in the Pacific Community in New Caledonia.
11. **The Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent is the North Star for the Pacific region as endorsed by Pacific Leaders in 2022.** It includes seven thematic areas, from which SPREP has a leadership role in two, that are: Climate Change and Disasters; and Ocean and Environment. These align to the SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026, which outlines the vision of 'A resilient Pacific environment sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures'; and that climate change is the principal concern; and ocean, a cross cutting theme of all of the work of SPREP.
12. **The Secretariat remains committed to the implementation of the 2050 Strategy in close partnership with Members, CROP agencies and partners,** particularly in light of the review of the regional architecture. Partnership is crucial to all of the work of SPREP. As the Secretariat of the: Noumea Convention; the Waigani Convention; Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas; Pacific Climate Change Roundtable; Clean Pacific Roundtable; Pacific Meteorological Council; the Pacific Climate Change Centre; and Weather Ready Pacific; which are examples of the mechanisms that SPREP will use to implement the 2050 Strategy in partnership with Members, CROP agencies and partners.
13. **The Pacific Partnerships for Prosperity, an initiative of the Forum Chair, the Cook Islands, is aimed at catalysing the implementation of the 2050 Strategy** by ensuring that its Implementation Plan is well supported politically and financially to deliver on its goals and outcomes. For SPREP, two of the nine partnerships, include **Weather Ready Pacific** as endorsed by Pacific Leaders in 2021, which seeks to reduce the human and economic costs of severe weather, water and ocean events across Pacific island communities; and **Towards the Global Plastics Treaty**, which urges membership of the High Ambition Coalition on Plastic Pollution to help achieve an international legally binding

instrument on plastic pollution, including the marine environment. The Implementation and Monitoring Plan as led by the region will be presented to Leaders to consider at the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting to be held in the Cook Islands from 6 – 10 November 2023.

PANEL 1: CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Palau: Leadership of Pacific Small Island Developing States Across the Multilateral Environment Agreements

14. **For Small Island Developing States, the triple planetary crisis has further exacerbated impacts to food security, access to clean water, and livelihoods which are essential to respective progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and Pacific prosperity.** Importance of ensuring that multilateral environment agreements compliments, aligns, and supports the Pacific way of life is a must.
15. **The trajectory of biodiversity loss on the planet is alarming and not acceptable.** At the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Palau expressed urgency for ambitious text on thirty-by-thirty targets to ensure fully and highly protected areas of at least 30 percent of the planet's land and water by 2030.
16. **Palau continues to call for higher ambitions from developed countries to increase their efforts toward reducing global emissions to ensure that we keep 1.5 degree Celsius target within reach to ensure our survival.**
17. **Palau reiterated that work should be collective progress** that is inclusive, informed by science, taking into account diverse traditional knowledge, which leverages necessary resources, and builds capacity at all levels of society.

Wallis and Futuna: Blue Pacific Declaration on Local Commitments and Actions to Protect Ocean and Coasts

18. **The call from the Pacific region, has resonated in the territory of Wallis and Futuna** to be more involved through regional events, to support and bring to life the Oceania family.
19. **Faced with the three major challenges - economic, environmental and demographic** - and echoing the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, Wallis and Futuna shall sign their very own "Ocean Declaration", which is a call on the French Government to share ocean governance, so that together, local authorities are united and committed to better protecting our ocean. The aim of the "Ocean Declaration" is to sustainably manage its entire maritime domain for the benefit of local populations, including a 50-year moratorium on deep-sea mining.

20. **Pooling experience and sharing intelligence will enable Wallis and Futuna to meet the challenges of our time.** Interactions fostered by the work of SPREP and the Pacific Community, plays a central role in this ecosystem. An ecosystem is based on a set of players in dynamic equilibrium, susceptible to disruption but endowed with a great capacity for resilience thanks to its diversity and experience.
21. **This environmental battle is, and will continue to be, the clash between the human need to preserve the environment and the need to enjoy the material comforts of the present time.** This battle is not only regional and planetary, but also inter- and trans-generational.

Australia: Pacific Engagement in Joint Bid for 31st Session of the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP31)

22. **The Pacific region has emphasised globally the effects of climate change, as the most pressing threat,** affecting the livelihoods and shared security of the Blue Pacific Continent. Action is urgent and it is essential. It is the reason why the Australian Government stood with the Pacific in 2022 and declared a climate emergency. Australia is committed to embolden the world to expand ambition.
23. **Australia is on a path to net zero emissions through a transition to renewable energy.** It has set ambitious renewable energy targets to obtain 82 percent of electricity from the grid by 2030. It is currently 32 percent and have made investments to meet targets. From 2024, at least 50 per cent of significant new investments over AUD 3 million, will have a climate change objective.
24. **Australia supports Indo-Pacific countries to meet targets.** This will be factored into Australian development policy where climate risk will be factored into all development plans that are in turn aligned to nationally determined contributions and national planning priorities.
25. **Australia supports elevating the powerful voices of the Pacific.** Determined to build momentum on climate change action through the powerful articulation of Pacific island voices and putting their issues on centre stage. Australia is listening and seeks the support of Members to secure the Pacific COP31 bid. By hosting the Pacific COP31, this will be an opportunity to ensure the world will be listening to the climate change priorities of the Pacific.

New Zealand: Invasive Species and the Global Biodiversity Framework

26. **All of humanity depends on nature and the services it provides.** Biodiversity loss disrupts economies, livelihoods, and the ecosystems upon which we all depend. With all economic activity and human well-being depending on nature, biodiversity loss ranks among the most fundamental threats to humanity.

27. **Climate change is both a driver and a result of ecosystem degradation and so biodiversity protection is a critical part of the climate change response.** Healthy ecosystems absorb carbon, support adaptation and reduce disaster risk.
28. **COP15 and the adoption of the new global goals and targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss was a major milestone.** It elevates the significance and urgency of the biodiversity crisis, to being on par with the climate crisis.
29. **Pressures on the environment include degradation from invasive species,** illegal logging and maritime pollution, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, urban development, transnational crime and the endangered species trade, and many other issues.
30. **Invasive species are the largest contributor to biodiversity loss in many Pacific island countries.** Target 6 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is particularly relevant and identifies islands as priority sites. It aims to “Eliminate, minimise, reduce and or mitigate the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity and ecosystem services’.
31. **90 percent of global extinctions driven by invasive species occurred on islands and 20 percent of all impacts are reported from islands.** And it is forecast to get worse with new alien species currently being recorded at an unprecedented rate.
32. **The Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service** manages the impacts of invasive species on climate resilience. PRISMSS takes a collaborative and Pacific-led approach to supporting countries, and leverages knowledge from partners such as New Zealand’s Department of Conservation and Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research. New Zealand will make an additional investment of NZD 20.6 million to help scale up the impact of this work across the Pacific, which will build capacity and capability within PRISMSS, including funding new staff and delivering climate impact through its five programmes.

PANEL 1: CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (RESPONDENTS)

Nauru: Video Presentation

33. **Climate change is an existential threat.** Nauru has suffered severe environmental degradation due to historical phosphate mining activities. This exploitation destroyed much of the island's natural habitats, leading to significant ecological and economic consequences. The legacy of environmental destruction underscores the importance of addressing biodiversity conservation. Climate change only compounds these challenges and threatens many inhabited coastal areas with sea level rise.
34. **The Higher Ground Initiative.** Nauru has initiated the "Higher Ground" programme in 2019 to address the challenges posed by climate change. Originally focused on relocating critical infrastructure away from the coast, the initiative has evolved to prioritise sustainability and prosperity for the nation. This entails not only physical asset migration but also the creation of thriving communities with affordable housing, improved food, water, and energy security, sustainable transportation options, and a balance between built and

natural ecosystems. The plan aims to diversify the economy and ensure equitable benefits for Nauru. It will resume in 2024.

35. **Call for a Just Transition.** Nauru emphasised the need for a "just transition" in the global economic and financial system to support small islands and microstates. This transition should include increased access to finance for infrastructure, economic diversification, and climate change mitigation. Nauru insists that addressing climate change and biodiversity conservation requires a significant economic reorganisation on a global scale, one that rectifies past injustices and ensures the survival of vulnerable island nations.

French Polynesia

36. **Reassured commitment to support SPREP** and protect the ocean and environment – from all threats including from climate change, waste, nuclear, plastics, and Fish Aggregating Devices, etc.

Samoa

37. **Samoa as Chair of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and former Chair of Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS)** congratulated Palau for being the new PSIDS chair, and upcoming Chair of AOSIS.
38. **Engagement on multilateral environmental agreements, with support of Secretariat and One CROP approach for the UNFCCC meeting was excellent.** Much work to be done to improve collective effort at the Conference of Biological Diversity and other MEAs. At the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council there were many Pacific island representatives present, but there was no coordination. Seek PSIDS and the Secretariat to assist with future coordination and engagement, as missing potential opportunities without this.
39. **Samoa extended support for South-South collaboration** and welcomed Wallis and Futuna and others to join.
40. **Thanked Australia for the proposed net zero programme and appreciated Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) funding.**
41. **Samoa supports Australia's bid to be the COP31 Pacific host.** Samoa requested that COP 31 preparatory meetings be hosted in Samoa and other Pacific islands. On financing commitments, Samoa would like to implement projects to highlight at COP such as AOSIS and PSIDS priorities on Loss and Damage and Mitigation to ensure the Pacific is able to negotiate with concrete achievements noted.
42. **The most important issue for the Pacific islands is the need to build and retain capacity.**

Tuvalu

43. **Tuvalu expressed interest in Nauru presentation regarding planning and response to impacts on environment from past practices**, noting the negative impacts on health and economy based on historical phosphate mining.
44. **Tuvalu noted its support of Australia's bid in hosting Pacific COP 31**. Highlighted the importance of all Pacific islands being recognised for their unique circumstances, such as geography and population differences, particularly the lived experience of climate change impacts of low-lying atolls like Tuvalu. Importance of strategically creating positions, that support each other, and recognised the different and unique challenges faced.
45. **Tuvalu highlighted that it is already experiencing the impacts of climate change** and will continue to support and fight for all nations to address much needed actions on climate change.

Niue

46. **Noted the ambitious programmes and that much has been done**, with overarching work highlighting climate policies, strategies, and bilateral and multilateral programmes.
47. **Attended ten ministerial meetings in the past six weeks noting the importance of being present at the table to dialogue meaningfully**. The language is the same, the data and evidence is there, however the message needs to come from the heart, as science alone is not making a change. All need to consider a pathway for the Pacific which reflects reality.
48. **Appreciation extended to Australia and support for the Pacific COP 31, which is important for the Pacific**. Called for preparatory meetings to be hosted in the Pacific to enable countries to experience first-hand the climate crisis in the Pacific region.
49. **Call on governments to empower women, girls, and the marginalised communities to highlight climate issues**.
50. **Call on SPREP to highlight invasive species and the many biodiversity challenges**, as these are urgent issues given remote location and limited resources in the Pacific. Appreciation conveyed to New Zealand for the Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service (PRISMSS) and other donors for matching the New Zealand funding.

PANEL 2: OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND PLASTIC POLLUTION

Niue: Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) Initiative and Gender

51. **Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) is Niue's first Public-Private Partnership** between the Government of Niue and Tofia Niue, a local non-profit organisation, developed with assistance from Oceans 5. The pathways of the NOW Initiative noted as : 100 percent of

the exclusive economic zone is protected; 60 percent for general use; and 40 percent as a marine protected area and no-take zone.

52. **Sustainable financing ensuring longer term finance mechanisms**, continuity and availability of funding. Ocean Wide Trust (“Ocean Conservation Contribution”) now established and soon to be announced by the Niue Premier, which will enable access to funds that are sustainable while investment continues. NZD 32 million is the target to help capitalise the Ocean Wide Trust. Seed investors and pledges to be announced at the United Nations General Assembly.
53. **Pacific Political champion for gender and social inclusion**, noting gender and social inclusion is linked to everything that is done on climate change. Climate change requires the inclusion of all women and girls, and marginalised groups. Call on countries and governments, to ensure decision making is inclusive, and to recognise that if agreement is not reached on climate goals, how will this be explained to children and future generations. Attended ten ministerial meetings in the past six weeks and saw no women ministers until the SPREP Ministerial High-Level Talanoa with the strong presence of Australia.

Australia: Ocean and Plastics - INC High Ambition Coalition

54. **Under the Global Biodiversity Framework, to actively protect thirty percent of land and sea by 2030** Australia is working to fulfil commitment at home, by strengthening national marine park systems. Recently added highly protected waters around Macquarie Island – bringing Australia’s protected marine estate to 48 percent of its exclusive economic zone. Growing the Indigenous Protected Area programme, where First Nations Rangers are employed to look after their traditional land and sea country. Australia is in the process of adding 40 million hectares to protected lands and waters.
55. **United Nations biodiversity treaty for the high seas (BBNJ)** secured in 2023 after decades of preparation and advocacy. The high seas cover sixty percent of the world’s oceans. Australia will be one of the first countries to sign the treaty. When it comes into force, Australia will continue to work with the Pacific to potentially support new high seas marine protected areas in the Pacific region.
56. **The fight for an ambitious global treaty on plastic pollution.** Hope to see a plastic pollution free Pacific. Australia is a proud member of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution. Pacific voices have also been vocal in these negotiations. Aspiration to see a treaty that covers the full lifecycle of plastics, promotes a safe and circular economy, that introduces sustainable design standards and removes harmful chemicals. It is hoped that it will also include a consistent set of global rules to drive national action.
57. **Australia supports the Pacific Ocean Litter Project**, which aims to reduce single use plastics through national policies and local action including in government, but also helping businesses and communities replace these plastics with more sustainable alternatives.

58. **Australia is convening the Global Nature Positive Summit in Sydney in October 2024** complementing the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. Aim to bring the best environmental minds to Australia, from every continent on earth to share expertise and experience. The importance of protecting the planet for present and future generations. Australia is committed to supporting that journey in the Pacific, while also doing the necessary work at home.
59. **Transitioning economy, from fossil fuels to renewable energy – with a target of 82 percent renewables by 2030.** A substantial shift in the economy. Writing stronger environmental laws, to better protect land and sea. Other measures include establishing a new Environment Protection Agency, reaching thirty-by-thirty targets, developing a national sustainable ocean’s plan and stopping new extinctions on the continent.

France: Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) – Pacific Engagement Opportunities

60. **UNOC-3** will convene in Nice, France, in June 2025. The Governments of France and Costa Rica will co-chair. The specific vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) will be highlighted. One outcome of UNOC-3 will be the Nice Ocean Action Plan, which will outline solutions for responding to the declining health of the ocean. Call on all countries to support and participate in the UNOC-3.
61. **France supports multilateral processes** such as the recently adopted treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) and calls on all countries to ratify this agreement as soon as possible.
62. **SIDS are disproportionately burdened by the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.** France is fully committed to fighting climate change. Strengthening climate resilience and biodiversity conservation are France’s priorities for the region, noting a considerable increase in investment in these areas which are expected to reach 200 million Euro by 2027.

PANEL 2: OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND PLASTIC POLLUTION (RESPONDENTS)

Republic of Marshall Islands: Video Presentation

63. **Expressed commitment to continue supporting oceans work** under the One CROP umbrella at COP28 in Dubai.
64. **Stated that we must remind others of their promises** and play our own part in the Loss and Damage discussions.
65. **Emphasised that we must not allow donors to leave the pot empty in relation to the Loss and Damage discussions.**

66. **Highlighted that the Ministers of Fisheries in the Pacific have asked for the development of a climate change strategy** aligned to the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), with a focus on climate justice. Stated that this would be the appropriate platform for addressing the impacts of climate change on tuna fisheries.

New Caledonia

67. **New Caledonia offered to host the Pacific Islands Conference for the Conservation of Nature in 2025.**

68. **Ocean governance needs to be looked at in totality as well as marine spatial planning, which supports biodiversity conservation and other uses of the ocean.**

69. **The INC discussions needs to take that into consideration that the Pacific region does not contribute to the upstream aspects of circular economy. The issue of waste is equally important as oceans, biodiversity, and climate change.** These issues need to be looked at together as they are interrelated.

Samoa

70. **Waste management is the biggest issue faced in the Pacific in terms of our own doing.** Plastics is only part of the bigger waste problem. A lot of these areas we cannot address alone, as we do not have the economies of scale to manage as Small Island Developing States.

71. **Samoa as a large ocean state strongly supports INC and BBNJ.**

72. **Samoa welcomes support from France to enable strong Pacific representation at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France in 2024.**

Solomon Islands

73. **On ocean governance, marine spatial planning is complementary to biodiversity conservation and all uses of the ocean.** Important to look at the different uses of the ocean, whether climate change, or from a fisheries perspective. This is something that is work in progress in Solomon Islands, where collaboration is critical for the security of the Pacific ocean.

74. **Climate change is one of the major threats, to the health and wellbeing of the ocean. A fossil free approach is important.** One cannot talk about the ocean without acknowledging the greatest threat to it is climate change.

75. **The importance of waste management and understanding the pollutants from land-based sources, which are threatening territorial and coastal waters.** Improving solid waste management at the country level is critical, as pollution comes from the land and important to have discussions on circular economy.

76. **Recognise that the Pacific does not contribute or have control over the upstream aspects of a circular economy in terms of product design.** Discussions towards the plastics treaty needs to take this into consideration. The Pacific does not have the leverage over what is imported into the country. Important to note this in the negotiations process with respect to trade implications.
77. **Most difficult waste streams arise from materials imported into the region. The connection with trade, environment and waste management is very important.** These elements have to be included in the INC discussion and negotiations.
78. **Proper solid and liquid waste management** nationally will help with the overall protection of our ocean and our biophysical environment, as well.
79. **Acknowledge the Secretariat for its assistance towards the greening of the Pacific Games** and truly grateful to Australia and other partners within the different projects such as Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), Committing to Sustainable Waste Actions in the Pacific (SWAP), and PacWaste Plus etc for making it possible.
80. **The Pacific Games used as leverage to drive development policy areas and national initiatives that were difficult in the past.** Single use plastics regulation, instituted on 1 September 2023, which will have lasting impacts beyond the Games. **Also, allocation of land for the first sanitary landfill.** Games used to make a case of why Solomon Islands must have proper sanitary landfill.
81. **Discussions on biodiversity needs to make the connection with solid waste management, impacts of climate change and rising greenhouse gases,** with respect to the health of the ocean. The connectivity is important and needs to be recognised as part of a holistic system.