

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL OCEAN POLICY

VISION

A healthy Ocean that sustains the livelihoods and aspirations of Pacific Island communities.

THIS IS OUR OCEAN

1. The care of the ocean is the responsibility of all people. The oceans are inter-connected and interdependent, covering some seventy per cent of the world's surface. They are the last great frontier and their conservation and sustainable use is vital to the well being and survival of the human race.
2. Pacific Island communities inhabit the islands scattered throughout an Ocean across which some of the most inspiring migrations in human history have taken place, over many thousands of years. The Ocean unites Pacific Island communities more than anything else. It has supported generations of Pacific Island communities – not only as a medium for transport but also as a source of food, tradition and culture.
3. Our Ocean, coastal and island ecosystems contain high biological diversity that has sustained the lives of Pacific Island communities since first settlement. It contains the most extensive coral reefs in the world, globally important fisheries, significant seabed mineral resources and high number of threatened species. These ecosystems may contain many undiscovered resources of potential use to humankind.
4. Many thousands of islands and atolls are entirely coastal in nature.
5. The Ocean is not only a lifeline, it is also a source of hazard. These hazards can be increased by the impact of human activities both within and external to the Pacific Islands region.
6. Our Ocean provides the greatest opportunities for economic development. Responsibly managed, it has the potential to support Pacific Island communities in perpetuity.
7. As Pacific Island communities we are acutely aware that over ninety eight per cent of the 38.5 million square kilometres of the Earth's surface over which we have direct influence is ocean. But concerns for the long-term health of the Ocean are not confined to the areas covered by sovereign rights, they extend equally to adjacent areas of high seas.

8. Our commitment to the development of a common Policy for this Ocean stems from our collective awareness of an increasing number and severity of threats to its long-term integrity. This Policy presents a framework for the sustainable development, management and conservation of the resources and habitats within the region. It provides guiding principles for individual and collaborative action that will promote responsible stewardship of this large Ocean for regional and global benefit.
9. This policy is intended to promote the Pacific region as an ocean environment in support of sustainable development. It is not a legal document, however its guiding principles are founded on international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other international and regional agreements.
10. These guiding principles are: improving our understanding of the Ocean; sustainably developing and managing use of Ocean resources; maintaining the health of the Ocean; promoting the peaceful use of the Ocean; and creating partnerships and promoting co-operation.
11. We invite others to recognise our commitment to these guiding principles and support our strategies to implement this Policy to help ensure our Ocean, coasts and islands remain healthy and sustains the livelihoods and aspirations of Pacific Island communities.

WHY A REGIONAL OCEAN POLICY?

12. The need for a Policy is based on our collective awareness of the transboundary and dynamic nature of our Ocean, the increasing number and severity of threats to its long-term integrity, and the reality that sustainable economic and social development will be dependent on wise use of the Ocean and its resources. It is also based on our awareness of the potential for fragmentation of programmes and for conflicting commitments in different sectors as ocean-related activities increase. This requires increased regional collaborative arrangements among Pacific Island communities.

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

13. For the purpose of this Policy, the “region” includes that part of the Pacific Ocean in which the island countries and territories (Pacific Communities), that are members of the organisations comprising the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) are found. As such, the extent of the region includes not only the area within the 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundaries circumscribing these island countries, but also the ocean and coastal areas that encompass the extent of the marine ecosystems that support the region.

14. The "Ocean" is defined to include the waters of the ocean, the living and non-living elements within, the seabed beneath and the ocean-atmosphere and ocean-island interfaces.
15. Pacific Islands are often referred to as Small Island Developing States. They may also be thought of as Large Ocean Developing States.

Capacity Building

16. In order to replenish and sustain our knowledge base, it is necessary to generate new knowledge about the oceans upon which our way of life depends. Fundamental to the sustained generation of new knowledge is the continuing education of a cadre of scientists and policy makers. Educating and training people within the region is the best strategy for ensuring the continuity of marine understanding and replenishment of knowledge.

Vulnerability

17. Pacific Island communities are particularly vulnerable to certain environmental, economic and social circumstances.
18. Environmental factors include: climate variability, climate change and sea-level rise; immediate natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic events, fragile ecosystems and natural resource bases, and geographic isolation.
19. Economic factors include: limited land area and freshwater resources; limited local markets; high import dependencies; fluctuating world prices for commodities; and isolation, including large distances to world markets.
20. Social factors include: population growth & distribution; human and food security; external influences, cultural dilution and loss of traditional knowledge and practices.

Rights and responsibilities

21. The Ocean has been the major influence in the history of Pacific Island communities. Throughout the region, customary association with the sea forms the basis of present day social structures, livelihoods and tenure systems and traditional systems of stewardship governing its use.
22. International law and instruments confer rights on Pacific Island communities relating to the use of the Ocean and its resources. With these rights come responsibilities, especially for sustainable development, management and conservation of the ocean's living resources and for the protection of the ocean environment and its biodiversity.
23. Pacific Island communities have established national laws, based on international principles and customary practices, which provide for responsible management and use of the Ocean and its resources within their areas of jurisdiction.

24. The Pacific communities will work with other partners to promote the application of compatible policies by those partners in areas subject to their jurisdiction and surrounding waters, and with all other countries having interests in the region.
25. Island communities respect the rights and interests of others to participate in legitimate activities. With this sharing comes the expectation that they will meet their obligations and responsibilities to our Ocean.
26. This Policy promotes good stewardship which refers to active engagement by communities in caring for the oceans. It draws upon ideas, policies, institutions and enforcement procedures needed to protect the oceans and coasts from abuse including the effects of land-based activities.

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GOAL

27. The goal of this Policy is to ensure the future sustainable use of our Ocean and its resources by Pacific Islands communities and external partners.
28. The Guiding Principles to achieve this Goal are:
 - Improving our Understanding of the Ocean
 - Sustainably Developing and Managing the use of Ocean Resources
 - Maintaining the Health Of the Ocean
 - Promoting the Peaceful Use of the Ocean
 - Creating Partnerships and Promoting Co-Operation

PRINCIPLE 1- IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE OCEAN

29. Contemporary and traditional understanding of the ocean provides the basis for sustainable use of the ocean and its resources, for the amelioration of pollution and harmful practices and for the prediction of weather, climate and ocean variability.
30. Resource management approaches based purely on scientific information have had limited success in the region over the last 50 years. The cost of obtaining scientific information, in all but a few highly commercialised systems, is beyond the capacity of many islands. As a result

resource managers in the Region advocate precautionary management approaches that are more robust where comprehensive scientific understanding and intensive monitoring are difficult. This includes an enhanced role for communities and customary resource owners in the development and application of local management arrangements for local resources.

31. Whilst community approaches are essential for implementing effective resource management in many cases, the long-term maintenance of exploited ecosystems, particularly transboundary systems, still requires better science. Increased understanding of ocean and coastal processes and ecosystems is critically dependent on shared access to global and regional developments in science and technology, to enable research, exploration and development of both living and non-living marine resources, and on economic systems that can pay for long-term monitoring and observation. The result will be improved ability to effectively conserve marine biological diversity and predict the impact of climate variation and human use patterns on the health of the ocean.

Strategic Actions

- To identify and prioritise information needs and the co-operative mechanisms for acquiring, accessing and disseminating information.
- To strengthen national and regional capacity, encourage partnerships between regional and international organisations, and the public and private sectors, to improve our understanding of the ocean.
- To facilitate access to this information, encourage its wide application in the implementation of this Policy and any compatible national ocean policies that may be developed in association with it.
- To have regard for traditional knowledge and its potential to contribute to better understanding the ocean and to the effective management of resources.
- To promote further formal education and training of local people in marine science and marine affairs disciplines.

PRINCIPLE 2 – SUSTAINABLY DEVELOPING AND MANAGING THE USE OF OCEAN RESOURCES

32. Pacific Island communities are heavily reliant on the wide range of resources and services that the Ocean provides for their social, cultural and economic security. This includes not only the existing extractive uses of its living and non-living resources but also the non-extractive uses such as transport and communication, waste disposal, recreation and tourism, and cultural activities. New research, technologies and markets are creating opportunities for accessing and using the ocean and its resources.

33. To safeguard Pacific Island communities and maintain the health of our Ocean in perpetuity, it is imperative that we adopt a precautionary management approach to ensure the use of the Ocean and its resources are sustainable.

Strategic Actions

- To identify, prioritise and implement resource development and management actions and regimes, in accordance with the precautionary approach;
- To encourage equitable sharing of resource access and benefits at local, national and regional levels;
- To engage, as appropriate, local communities and other stakeholders in resource management decision making;
- To build capacity of Pacific Island communities for sustainable resource development and management;
- To establish and protect traditional knowledge rights.
- To establish and protect intellectual property rights.

PRINCIPLE 3 - MAINTAINING THE HEALTH OF THE OCEAN

34. The health and productivity of our Ocean is driven by regional-scale ecosystem processes. It is dependent upon preserving ecosystem integrity and minimising the harmful impact of human activity.
35. Threats to ocean and coastal health and productivity, reflected in a degradation in water quality and resource depletion include accidental and deliberate dumping of fuels, chemicals and ballast water from ships, aircraft and satellite launches, and non sustainable resource use.
36. Pollution from the land contributes up to eighty per cent of all ocean pollution and is a major threat to the long-term health of nearshore systems affecting ecological processes, public health and social and commercial use of ocean resources.

Strategic Actions

- To adopt an integrated transboundary approach, through harmonised institutional arrangements, including existing international and regional agreements, to managing marine ecosystems for long-term sustainable benefit.
- To incorporate sound environmental and social practices into economic development activities.
- To protect and conserve biological diversity of the ocean ecosystem at local, national and regional scales.

- To reduce the impact of all sources of pollution on our Ocean environment.

PRINCIPLE 4 – PROMOTING THE PEACEFUL USE OF THE OCEAN

37. Peaceful uses of the Ocean have environmental, political, social economic, and security dimensions. Promoting peaceful use means discouraging and reducing unacceptable, illicit, criminal, or other activities contrary to regional and international agreements. Such activities threaten the major source of livelihood for Pacific Island communities.

Strategic Actions

- To ensure that all activities carried out in our Ocean meet all relevant international and regional standards, and do not cause environmental damage, social or economic hardship in the region.
- To seek remedial action in the event of an incident resulting from non-peaceful use of the Ocean
- To ensure that the ocean is not used for criminal activities nor for other activities that breach local, national or international laws
- To encourage co-operation amongst law enforcement agencies.

PRINCIPLE 5 – CREATING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROMOTING CO-OPERATION

38. Partnerships and cooperation provide an enabling environment and are essential for the sustainable management of our Ocean. As a group Pacific Island communities achieve economies of scale, a united voice for international advocacy, a regional power bloc with increased international influence and a forum for developing coordinated action on ocean issues of mutual interest or with transboundary implications.

39. In pursuit of creating partnerships and promoting cooperation, Pacific Island communities will seek to maintain sovereign rights and responsibilities in managing, protecting and developing the Ocean.

Strategic Actions

- To foster partnerships and cooperation in the areas of security, monitoring, enforcement and the sustainable use of resources.
- To make fullest possible use of regional and international partnerships and collaboration, such as regional organisations, ocean-related treaties, and bilateral arrangements as appropriate.

- To have regard for the ocean policies of ocean jurisdictions adjoining our own, and advocate that their policies have regard for this Policy.
- To encourage Pacific Island communities to develop national ocean policies that complement and are consistent with this Policy.

FUTURE

This Policy is the result of a regional effort to achieve responsible ocean governance. It is based on existing international and regional agreements that establish a broad framework for regional cooperation and coordination to sustainably manage and conserve the ocean ecosystem in the region. It provides the basis for the harmonisation of national and regional actions, for the next five years. The implementation process will require a commitment by all stakeholders.

This Policy articulates guiding principles and strategic actions that will define a regional Pacific Ocean Initiative. The Initiative will include a Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Summit to define the status of current knowledge and activities, and a review process to define progress, and will provide an integrated framework to include existing programmes, and identify and prioritise future Action Plans.