

SPEECH



Remarks by
Hon. Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi
At the Office of Pacific Ocean Commissioner Event
“Understanding the Ocean Climate Crosswalk: A Pacific Perspective”
Pacific and Koronivia Pavilion
Saturday 8 December 2018: 2.30 – 4.30pm



Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat and Pacific Ocean Commissioner

Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy on Oceans

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Despite the cold temperatures outside especially for us from the Pacific, I am very pleased that the atmosphere and temperature in the Pacific and Koronivia Pavilion is more warm and friendly. I congratulate the One Crop Plus team and thank the COP23 Presidency, the Government of Fiji and Government of New Zealand for the excellent job in making this pavilion a Pacific “home away from home”.

Excellencies

Samoa and our Pacific Island Forum members see ourselves as a Blue Pacific continent. That should not come as a surprise to you all because we recognize the geostrategic, economic, cultural and ecological importance of the world's largest ocean, the Pacific Ocean, which we call our home.

[Importance of the Ocean for Pacific]

The Pacific Ocean has provided our island communities their cultural and historical identity and attachment since time immemorial. The ocean exceeds land masses by an average factor of 300 to 1, and the Pacific peoples rely on the ocean for food, income, culture, and recreation that are so 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 leadership as the Blue Pacific matters greatly.

Coral reef ecosystems created our atoll islands and they are our natural barriers that protect shorelines from storm surge and erosion – defending our villages, businesses, government structures and residents at coastal areas.

[Action on Ocean]

As a region, we have adopted a number of ocean related communiqués and declarations and take pride in our leadership on ocean governance arrangements. We have established a ban on driftnet fishing; invested in key partnerships to help address IUU fishing; have lobbied for the stand alone SDG Goal 14 on Oceans and continue to call for its effective implementation. Our region also has a total of 346 marine protected areas. We as Leaders of the region have committed to fast track the development of policies to ban the use of single-use plastic bags, plastic and styrofoam packaging and we called on Pacific Rim partners to join and commit to action on addressing marine pollution and marine debris. These are a few examples to address some of the

mounting negative impacts on the health of the ocean, driven by human activity. These initiatives also highlight the value our region places in protecting and promoting the development and security of the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore Pacific Leaders **in** 2017 decided on a regional security declaration and **welcomed** the extensive security discussions held on an expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change. Pacific Leaders **in 2018 adopted a** Regional Security Declaration known as the Boe Declaration which responds to the region's complex and evolving regional security environment. An action plan for implementation, is being developed and we call on the UN and all partners for support in this regard.

[National Ocean Action]

For Samoa at the UN Ocean Conference that focused on the implementation of SDG14 on Ocean, we made 12 voluntary commitments in support of SDG14 implementation. These commitments included 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 also looked at efforts that involve communities in fisheries management and coastal infrastructure management plans that also help them build resilience and adapt to impacts of climate change. We have 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 which are under threat from plastic waste and marine litter, Samoa has restricted the importation of plastic bags since the introduction of the Plastic Bag Prohibition on Importation Regulations 2006. We are taking further steps to address marine litter and have now instituted a ban on single use plastic bags and plastic straws which will take

effect from January 2019. It is also intended that Styrofoam food containers and cups will be banned once environmentally friendly options have been identified and are in use. And our public has already responded proactively!

[Climate change and Ocean]

Sadly, 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. Excellencies and colleagues – we cannot speak about oceans in isolation and should be an integral part of our climate discussions, to name a few

The recent IPCC Special 1.5 Report shows that a 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming is not just a limit for SIDS, it's 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 a risk we cannot afford.

The coral reefs, that provide about 70 % of the protein in the diet of Pacific Islanders and that help provide protection to at least 50% of the Pacific people living within 1.5km of the coast, will be severely degraded at 1.5°C of warming, and will all but disappear at 2°C. 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. Estimates suggest that global fisheries catch will decrease by 3 million tonnes per degree Celsius of warming. This is worrying for fisheries-dependent nations like ours. The risk of irreversible loss of many marine and coastal ecosystems increases with global warming, especially with warming of 2°C or more.

The ocean however, has a two-way relationship with weather and climate. The ocean influences the weather, while changes in climate can fundamentally alter many properties of the oceans. Clearly, the ocean is a key component of the

climate system. Scientists continue to highlight the critical role played by the Ocean in regulating the Climate. The Ocean is one of the major sinks of carbon sequestration and storage.

For us the ocean – climate “crosswalk” is clear. Addressing the adverse impacts of climate change and ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources are two key and interlinked priorities for our Blue Pacific. Ocean and Climate Action are two sides of the same coin.

[Oceans in UNFCCC]

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I reiterate the importance of the inextricable links between ocean and climate. A key focus therefore of our engagement of Pacific in the COP process is on this link and the need for Oceans to become an integral part of the continuing climate change agenda. The launching of the Oceans Pathway at COP 23 led by Pacific leaders sought to address and strengthen actions related to the ocean-climate nexus.

I have earlier highlighted some of the devastating impacts for us at above 1.5 degrees Celsius warming. Unfortunately, the IPCC 1.5 report confirms that the current commitments are far from sufficient and will not achieve the Paris Agreement’s warming limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius. This is why the objective of the Talanoa Dialogue is crucial. That is, we need to raise the level of ambition of the next round of NDCs. We believe the ocean is key to raising these ambitions not only as the Earth’s largest carbon sink, but it has potential for clean energy generation, a source of food security and supply, and a storehouse of ecosystems, which when healthy, can protect coastlines.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentleman

Oceans plays a critical role in achieving the ambitions of the Paris Agreement and objectives of the UNFCCC. Therefore I stress the need to ensure the relevant inclusion of the Ocean in this UNFCCC process.

I also call everyone to work together for genuine and durable partnerships, that can turn Urgent Ocean Action into much needed Ambitious Climate Action.

Thank you