

**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM
SPECIAL LEADERS' RETREAT**

3 February 2021

LEADERS' DECISIONS



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

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A Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders' Retreat was convened virtually on 3 February 2021. The meeting was attended by the Heads of States and Governments of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. French Polynesia was represented by its Vice President, and New Zealand by its Minister of Foreign Affairs.

2. Forum Leaders **expressed** their appreciation to the Chair of the Forum and Prime Minister of Tuvalu and his government for ably leading and steering the Forum family for an extended timeframe and through one of the most difficult periods the region has faced as a result of the three-pronged crisis of COVID-19, economic downturn, and climate change and its impacts.

COVID-19

3. Leaders **acknowledged** the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and **recognised** the catastrophic impact it has had on economic growth and the wellbeing of Pacific peoples across the region. Leaders **commended** the exceptional response measures implemented by Forum Members in order to protect their people and resulting in a relatively low rate of infection across the region.

4. Leaders **reaffirmed** the importance of coordination and collaboration between regional and international partners to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders **acknowledged** the support facilitated through the *Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19* and **underscored** the 2020 statements by the Forum Foreign Ministers and Forum Economic Ministers on COVID-19.

5. Leaders **reaffirmed** that the health and wellbeing of Pacific peoples remain their highest priority. Leaders **emphasised** the importance of ensuring the distribution of safe and effective vaccines in the Pacific region. Leaders **reiterated** their call to global leaders to support the equitable and affordable distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines to all peoples, and **committed** to work together to ensure the timely and equitable distribution of vaccines in the Pacific.

6. Leaders further **emphasised** the need for all Pacific peoples to be vaccinated to mitigate health concerns and improve their wellbeing and to facilitate early economic recovery. Leaders **acknowledged** the prompt responses of Forum Members to address the related economic crisis and **committed** to working together to restore air and sea connectivity and chart a course to sustainable economic recovery.

7. Leaders **reaffirmed** their joint statement to the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on COVID-19 and **requested** an urgent meeting of the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in 2021, supported by the Pacific Community and the World Health Organisation (WHO), to consider a coordinated regional approach and strategy for the equitable and affordable access to and distribution of safe and effective vaccines, including targeted regional advocacy efforts to the UN Secretary General and the WHO Director General, and to report back to Leaders as soon as possible.

8. Leaders **commended** the significant support of Australia and New Zealand to secure an adequate supply of safe and effective vaccines for the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally, including through direct support for both doses and rollout within national health systems. Leaders **acknowledged** Australia and New Zealand's contributions and advocacy for the region to access safe and effective vaccines through the COVAX Facility.

9. Leaders also **acknowledged** the support of development partners and the international community for providing direct support in strengthening the health systems of Forum Island Countries.

APPOINTMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

10. Leaders **agreed** to appoint the Honourable Henry Puna of the Cook Islands as the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat for a three-year term.

11. Leaders **agreed** to review the 2002 *Appointment Procedures for the Secretary General* and **mandated** the Forum Officials Committee to develop a selection process for Leaders' consideration.

APPRECIATION TO THE OUTGOING SECRETARY GENERAL

12. Leaders **expressed** their appreciation and gratitude to the outgoing Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor, for her exceptional stewardship of Pacific regionalism and contribution to the Blue Pacific during her tenure. Leaders **commended** her strong leadership of the Secretariat, as well as Pacific Ocean Commissioner and Chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, and **noted** with respect the strengthened relevance of Pacific Regionalism, including the importance of the voice of Pacific peoples in regional policy development, particularly in the face of a dynamic and challenging geopolitical environment.

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

13. Leaders **confirmed** the next meeting of the Forum in Fiji.

OUT-OF-SESSION DECISIONS

14. Leaders **confirmed** their endorsement of the key issues circulated for out-of-session consideration, as provided at Annex A.

OUT-OF-SESSION DECISIONS

Regional Governance and Institutional Arrangements

Leaders:

- (a) **considered** an update on the recommendations of the *Review of the Pacific Islands Forum Meeting Processes* and **agreed** to take a decision at the next Forum Leaders Meeting;
- (b) **endorsed** the convening of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting in 2021 and thereafter, the regularisation of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting on a biennial basis;
- (c) **endorsed** the Charter for the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (Attachment 1); and
- (d) **advised** on the ongoing CROP membership of the Pacific Islands Development Program and **agreed** to take a decision at the next Forum Leaders Meeting.

Pacific Resilience Partnership

2. Leaders **endorsed** the extension of the trial period of the Pacific Resilience Partnership up to 2021.

Pacific Islands Forum Oceans Statement

3. Leaders **endorsed** the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Oceans Statement 2021 (Attachment 2).

Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting

4. Leaders **endorsed** an annual standing Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting ahead of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting to ensure an enduring focus on the critical role gender has on issues in the Pacific.

Teieniwa Vision – Pacific Unity Against Corruption

5. Leaders **endorsed** the adoption of the *Teieniwa Vision* as the Forum's regional commitment to progress Pacific unity against corruption.

FORUM TRADE MINISTERS MEETING CHARTER

Background

1. The Forum Trade Ministerial Meeting (FTMM) provides a unique regional ministerial-level platform to discuss strategic regional solutions pertaining to: enhancing regional development-oriented growth; and, stimulating entrepreneurial and employment opportunities through the collective engagement for deepening regional trade and economic integration. In light of ongoing climate change crisis impacts coupled with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Forum Trade Ministers are expected to periodically engage to determine regional pathways to reinstate regional supply chains with new and traditional trading partners; strengthen the Region's solidarity towards building resilient business and regional interdependence; and, design the Region's collective approach to engage the rest of the world in areas of shared interest such as negotiation of multilateral rules to sustainably manage, use and conserve marine resources.
2. Moreover, the FTMM is the effective policy decision-making body to deliver Forum Leaders' vision and regional actions on matters relating to broader trade and investment development initiatives.

Purpose

3. The purpose of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM) is to discuss and direct action on:
 - (a) Collective partnership, engagement and dialogue to shape new policies and approaches that boost intra-regional trade and investment, and how best the region can further deepen its integration efforts within the context of the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* and the Blue Pacific narrative;
 - (b) Fostering of regional political solidarity, enhancing economic prosperity for the people of the Blue Pacific, and promoting people-centered development;
 - (c) Embracing collective engagement and approaches at regional and international high-level meetings to advocate agreed Forum trade related positions, and driving engagement and other strategies for collective regional trade influence in significant global fora;
 - (d) Leading and/or coordinating implementation of Leaders' directives associated with Trade and Investment; and in-the-spirit of the Blue Pacific narrative,
 - (e) Fostering regional policy coherence on regional economic integration, including sub-regional arrangements, through collaboration, cooperation and coordination where appropriate - in order to realise potential benefits;

Governance arrangements

4. The FTMM will be chaired by the relevant Ministerial representative of the incumbent Forum Chair. This alignment of chairing arrangements serves to support the Forum Chair in their host responsibilities, which include leading Forum delegations in summities with Forum Dialogue partners and in international events and negotiations.
5. The Chair shall manage the Forum Trade Ministerial meeting and will ensure that decisions are recorded in writing.

6. Forum Trade Ministers shall report their meeting outcomes to Forum Leaders, through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General.
7. Forum Trade Ministers will identify opportunities for engagement with relevant external stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.
8. The FTMM will consider and determine any applications or requests to observe the meeting in line with agreed “Observer Status Criteria” established by the Forum.
9. This charter does not cover meetings convened in the margins of FTMM.

Meeting Arrangements

10. The FTMM will be convened by the Pacific Islands Forum’s Secretary General on a biennial basis, whereas Senior Trade Officials will meet inter-sessionally to progress FTMM decisions.
11. Additional meetings of the FTMM may be convened in special circumstances, as deemed necessary by Leaders or by Trade Ministers.
12. All other arrangements and procedures for the FTMM shall be consistent with the Forum Secretariat Meetings Policy.

Resourcing

13. Member countries are responsible for funding the attendance of their delegations to the meetings.

Review and amendment

14. The FTMM Charter will be reviewed every three years or at the discretion of Forum Leaders, and may be amended as and when deemed necessary.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Suva
June 2020

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement 2020/21

1. We, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders, representing the Blue Pacific and its peoples, are committed to strong regional action, harnessing shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and acting as one Blue Pacific Continent. With 96 per cent of our region being Ocean, the Ocean is at the heart of our geography, our cultures and our economies.
2. Starting in 2021, we will be guided by a new *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* in order to protect people, place and prospects of the *Blue Pacific*. It is envisaged that this new strategy will reinforce the prioritisation of ocean and climate change considerations into all regional and national policies and plans, both public and private.
3. We recognise the impacts and ongoing challenges that COVID-19 has imposed on our region and its Ocean-driven economic sectors. The pandemic has led to major disruptions, reinforcing the need for the Blue Pacific and the international community to renew ambition and action on the Ocean at national, regional and global levels, including towards recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 that advances the goals of the Paris Agreement.
4. The potential of the Ocean to meet sustainable development needs is enormous; but only if our oceans can be restored and maintained to a healthy and productive state. Ongoing trends of exploitation and degradation of marine ecosystems show that not only have endeavors to date been insufficient, but risks are increasing every day. More must be done to protect our Ocean as it provides solutions to some of our existential challenges such as climate change.
5. As custodians of the Blue Pacific, we have demonstrated our leadership and collective resolve to protect the Pacific Ocean. It is our endowment fund, inherited from our ancestors and which we share with future generations. We must care for, invest in and nurture the Ocean to continue to benefit from it.

Recommitting to our regional ocean policies

6. We reaffirm our commitment to sustainably manage, use and conserve our Ocean and its resources, as one Blue Pacific, guided by our regional commitments and policy instruments.¹

Ocean advocacy and engagement

7. We affirm Forum Foreign Ministers' decision to prioritise sustainable ocean management, use and conservation for the Forum's international engagement and advocacy. As we come together for the 2nd UN Ocean Conference (2UNOC), the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), the Our Ocean Conference, and 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP26), and as we enter the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021 – 2030 and the UN Decade on Ecosystems Restoration 2021 - 2030, we must collectively enhance our understanding of the ocean; strengthen the

¹ Namely: Vemööre Declaration: Commitments to Nature Conservation Action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021 – 2025; 2019 Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now; 2018 Boe Declaration for Regional Security; 2016 Pohnpei Ocean Statement: A Course to Sustainability; and 2014 Palau Declaration on The Ocean: Life and Future and regional policy instruments: 2010 Framework for Pacific Oceanscape; 2002 Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Framework for Integrated Strategic Action Policy; the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, 2021 – 2025; Regional Action Plan: Marine Litter; Cleaner Pacific 2025 Strategy; Framework for Pacific Regionalism; Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific; and Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries.

ocean science and policy interface, and focus on effective implementation of all commitments made and go further, to ensure a thriving Ocean now, and for the future. We note the important role of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner on advocacy and attention to Ocean priorities, decisions and processes, including to monitor and report on progress in the implementation of regional Ocean commitments.

8. We acknowledge Palau's role as host of the 7th Our Ocean Conference in 2021, and recognise that hosting this conference and other international events in our Blue Pacific region provides a critical opportunity to showcase regional leadership, build partnerships and raise ambitious action-oriented solutions.

Biodiversity

9. We note the global biodiversity crisis and emphasise the importance of having strong Ocean governance in place both within, and beyond, national jurisdictions of countries of the Blue Pacific, to ensure the holistic and sustainable management of the Ocean.
10. We support global action to develop and implement the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This framework, along with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, will provide further momentum to holistically safeguard our rich biodiversity.
11. We strive for the expeditious finalisation, adoption and entry into force of an international legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ) that establishes a robust and ambitious framework to conserve and sustainably use our marine biodiversity. This framework must be based on the best available scientific information and relevant traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities; taking into account the precautionary approach; recognising the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States; recognising the special interests and roles of coastal states; and taking into account cumulative impacts of activities, as well as of climate change, without undermining existing relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional and sectoral bodies.

Urgent climate change action

12. We call for urgent action to reduce and prevent the irreversible impacts of climate change on our Ocean, reiterating that climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Blue Pacific. We also note with significant concern, that based on current trends we will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius as early as 2030 unless urgent action is taken, with significant adverse impacts on the Ocean. The recognition of the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus entails that the protection of one cannot be at the expense of the other, and that radical ambition is required. This should include meeting or exceeding nationally determined contributions (NDCs), formulating mid-century low emissions development strategies in 2020 and may include commitment and strategies to achieve net zero carbon by 2050.
13. We welcome the convening of the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue, which considered how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action in this context, including through consideration of developing a work program on Ocean within the UNFCCC.
14. We call for increased investment for the establishment of observation systems, to understand impacts of climate change on the Ocean, blue carbon protection and restoration initiatives for climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as monitoring and prediction to strengthen natural disaster response and risk reduction strategies for our islands. The international community must meet the global climate finance commitment of at least USD 100 billion per year by 2020 from a variety of sources to invest in climate

action in developing countries. This investment should be transparently accounted for in its provision and implementation. This should also include exploring innovative financing options and mechanisms for the Ocean.

Securing the Blue Pacific

15. Recognising the strategic importance and value of the Ocean and its peaceful use, we reaffirm our commitment to the rules-based international order founded on the UN Charter, adherence to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and resolution of international disputes by peaceful means.
16. Securing the limits of the Blue Pacific Continent against the threats of sea-level rise and climate change is the defining issue underpinning the full realisation of the Blue Pacific Continent. We are committed to concluding outstanding maritime boundaries claims and zones, including related treaties and legal frameworks to support the sustainable development and ensure the peace and security of our Blue Pacific Continent not only from environment threats but also from external geo-strategic interests. We are also committed to a collective effort, including to develop international law, with that aim of ensuring that once a Forum Member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with the 1982 *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*, the Member's maritime zones cannot be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change.

Conservation and sustainable management of the ocean and its resources

17. We commit to responsibly and effectively manage 100% of the Blue Pacific Ocean within and beyond national jurisdiction to ensure its health, productivity, resilience and safety, based on the best available scientific information and traditional knowledge. This includes taking into account ecological and cultural connectivity when designating and establishing conservation and management measures and areas-based management measures including marine protected areas.
18. We are committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of the *Blue Pacific's* fisheries resources currently being compromised by Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, harmful fisheries subsidies, climate change, low level of value-adding of tuna in the region and marine pollution recognising its centrality to the wellbeing of communities and economies, and as guided by our *Regional Fisheries Roadmap*. Revenues from tuna fisheries provide much needed income for Forum Island members. The industry also provides over 22,000 jobs across the region. COVID-19 and its impact on sectors such as tourism, has increased the importance of fisheries resources for Forum Island members, both in terms of economic returns and for food security.
19. We call for the increased use of technology, to address threats to the long-term sustainability of fisheries resources and the associated impacts on the social and economic well-being of our people. We call for increased investment in coastal and marine ecosystem restoration and management capacities, sustainable aquaculture development and research activities. Investment is needed for the future of sustainable coastal and marine tourism, economic resilience of fisheries, and community-level economic uplift and food security. We call for focused investment and capacity building towards retaining the traditional knowledge of sustainable fishing practices for future generations of Pacific people.

Maritime connectivity and renewable energy

20. Recognising that the Blue Pacific's maritime transport industry plays a critical role, we call for the sustainable and resilient development of the maritime industry, including investment in new technology

and operations, to ensure safe, accessible, efficient and affordable maritime transport which contributes to the International Maritime Organizations decarbonisation strategy and a quieter maritime sector.

21. We are committed to promote partnerships that provide incentives for investment in sustainable ocean-based renewable energy – for new economic opportunities and energy security.

Combatting marine pollution

22. Marine pollution, of all kinds, produces negative ecological and socio-economic impacts including plastics; nuclear waste, radioactive and other contaminants; World War II wrecks and other shipwrecks; and unexploded ordnances. Marine pollution puts entire ecosystems and species at risk in addition to the people who depend on them for livelihood and economic development. Plastic pollution is a planetary threat affecting nearly every marine and freshwater ecosystem globally. Members contribute less than 1.3 percent of the mismanaged plastics in the world’s oceans but are one of the main recipients.
23. As the Blue Pacific, we have developed and implemented a regional action plan on marine litter (2018-2025) as part of the *Cleaner Pacific 2025* strategy. However, we recognise the interconnectivity of the world’s oceans means that marine pollution requires the involvement of all countries and people to be effectively addressed. We call on Pacific Rim countries to expeditiously implement relevant measures to prevent and effectively manage marine pollution and litter, including through land-based sources, in accordance with international law. The most effective control measures remain prevention and avoiding waste generation. We further call on governments to ensure that appropriate global mechanisms are in place to enable the transformation of the global plastics economy.

Access to development finance and blue recovery

24. Achieving the objectives of the Blue Pacific requires increased levels of development and other sources of finance for the Ocean. It also requires strengthening of enabling environments at all levels, including institutional and human capacity building at the national level and promoting access to science, knowledge, infrastructure, technology and innovation that is open and responsive to the specificities and challenges of our region.
25. We call on greater collaboration with development partners to improve economic recovery efforts and the formation of a sustainable ocean economy in response to COVID-19 pandemic challenges. We call for the development of innovative financing mechanisms, to mobilise financial resources to improve the amount and efficacy of finance to effectively implement ocean governance objectives in the region.
26. We call on global financing institutions, including the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility and Adaptation Fund, to increase investments on oceans and climate change. Further, we call on the international community to identify innovative start-ups as champions to help address development challenges; and promote sustainable and innovative solutions, including implementing ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change, to further develop and advance regional COVID-19 recovery efforts.
27. The Ocean is our past, our present, our future. By deepening collective responsibility and accountability for the stewardship of the Ocean, we can protect our people, place and prospects and secure the future of our Blue Pacific Continent.