

Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) Evaluation

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM/ ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
AUD	Australian Dollars
BBNJ	Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
EPOG	Enhancing Pacific Ocean Governance
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
FPO	Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape
GEM	Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division, SPC
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand
MSWG	Marine Sector Working Group
OPOC	Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner
POA	Pacific Ocean Alliance
POC	Pacific Ocean Commissioner
PIC	Pacific Island Country
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PROP	Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLR	Sea Level Rise
SG	Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
SPC	Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UN	United Nations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Evaluation

This Independent evaluation of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) was commissioned by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and conducted over October - November 2020. DFAT and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) have been providing grant funding for OPOC since December 2017.¹ The Grant Arrangement is scheduled to conclude on 30 June 2021. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which DFAT and MFAT's investment in OPOC has been an effective way to assist advocacy and attention to Pacific Ocean priorities, decisions, and processes at national, regional and international levels. The results of the evaluation will help inform both DFAT and MFAT on options for future support and may also be informative for the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders and the new PIF Secretary-General (SG) and Pacific Ocean Commissioner (yet to be appointed), who should take up the role from January 2021.

Methodology

The formative evaluation was completed by three independent evaluators. The methodology featured document review, interviews with key project stakeholders, application of a modified Outcome Harvest methodology, use of a sustainability assessment framework and validation discussions to test findings and clarify details with select stakeholders.

Conclusions

Based on the evaluation findings, the Evaluators make the following conclusions:

- **OPOC is highly relevant for the Pacific through its professional support of the POC and its functions as a convenor, coordinator and advocate, and the link it makes between priority regional and international ocean issues.** Its relevance will continue to increase with the growing prominence and importance of the ocean for the Pacific region in a range of intersecting policy and program areas.
- **The value of OPOC is not universally recognised or endorsed by regional stakeholders who hold a diversity of views regarding the policy areas that OPOC should to engage on and contribute to.** By adopting a focused approach and through more consistent engagement with stakeholders (for example through the BBNJ process), OPOC has started to better articulate and demonstrate its value within the crowded and contested space of ocean policy in the Pacific.
- **A sufficient level of funding for staffing and operations of OPOC has been provided by MFAT and DFAT, however (due to a freeze on recruitment by PIFS), the current staffing levels are insufficient to support consistent quality and well-time delivery of the approved program of work.** Additional human resource capacity is required for OPOC to be well placed to effectively meet future demands.

¹ The total value of Australia and New Zealand's grant to OPOC is AUD 2,780,000, which comprises contributions from both Australia (AUD 690,000) and New Zealand (AUD 2,090,000). Note French Polynesia and Spain also provide funding for OPOC.

- **As the prominence and the scale and scope of ocean work regionally and internationally continues to increase, the institutional arrangements that were put in place in 2010 as an interim measure (whereby OPOC is located within PIFS and the role of POC sits with the SG) warrant review within the current context.** While co-location supports cost efficiencies, the current arrangements may slow certain processes and limit the ability of OPOC to effectively support the POC to advocate and drive new thinking and initiatives within outside the region.
- **Further efforts are required to strengthen the conditions that will support the forward sustainability of OPOC.** Increasing commitment and understanding of OPOC's role and contribution by PICs, CROP agencies and CSO stakeholders within the region, seeking ways to diversify funding to manage the current high dependence on MFAT and DFAT are critical conditions towards sustainability that need to be enhanced.

Recommendations

The Evaluators submit the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Clarify OPOC's mandate, priorities and responsibilities and strategically engage and communicate these clearly to key stakeholders, with a view to gaining stronger stakeholder commitment on engagement with the POC and OPOC and contributing guidance in setting forward workplans.

Recommendation 2: Refine the POC and OPOC's institutional arrangements to align with OPOC's clarified mandate (Recommendation 1 above).

Recommendation 3: Provide OPOC with the requisite budget and staffing profile (covering policy, technical, communications, and administrative skills) to effectively deliver on OPOC's agreed scope of work in the short-term. Over the longer term, ensure OPOC's budget and staffing profile remain aligned with any revisions to OPOC's mandate (per Recommendations 1 and 2 above).

Recommendation 4: Strengthen collaboration with the POA: there is potential for OPOC to more effectively and strategically draw on POA resources and engage with POA members to help inform OPOC's work. But given POA membership is a 'broad church', a clear OPOC / POA delineation is essential to limit duplication, confusion and even tension. Implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2 above should assist with OPOC/POA delineation, enabling stronger OPOC / POA member collaboration over the medium term.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen GESI: upon implementation of Recommendations 1-3 above, OPOC should consider developing a simple GESI strategy and implementation plan to ensure OPOC incorporates GESI when planning and delivering its work (including events, thematic areas and communications). Noting OPOC's limited capabilities in this area, GESI advisers from PIFS, DFAT and/or MFAT may support this process.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning in relation to OPOC's performance, to ensure it remains aligned to emerging regional priorities. These efforts should be tied to OPOC's work developing its website and dashboard for tracking ocean initiatives that align with the strategic priorities of the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (FPO).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Evaluation

In 2010, the PIF Leaders mandated the establishment of OPOC, reflecting Strategic Priority 2 (Good Ocean Governance) of the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (FPO):

Establishment of a Regional Ocean Commissioner, with dedicated professional support, would provide the necessary high-level representation and commitment that is urgently required to ensure dedicated advocacy and attention to ocean priorities, decisions and processes at national, regional and international levels.²

The SG, Dame Meg Taylor, is the current POC. 2020 is her final year in the role.

The Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) managed support for the role of POC until 2014. At that time the Government of Australia provided in-kind dedicated support through secondment of staff and of an Australian Volunteer in International Development to establish OPOC as a stand-alone office to provide policy coordination and professional support to the POC. Funding was then made available in 2016 to appoint OPOC staff.

The 2017 OPOC Concept Note sets out OPOC's responsibilities to include: support the POC on advocacy regionally and internationally; coordination with relevant CROP agencies, civil society organisations and the private sector and as appropriate and required provide support to achieve FPO aims and The Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy (PIROP) priorities; coordination with the POA; coordination of reporting and communication on the FPO; maintain a register of Pacific Ocean initiatives and projects; support national ocean governance and policy processes; support Pacific Permanent Missions to the United Nations (UN) on ocean issues; and support regional preparatory processes to identify issues and report progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 (Life Below Water) and other related SDGs.³

DFAT and MFAT have been providing grant funding for OPOC since December 2017.⁴ The Grant Arrangement is scheduled to conclude on 30 June 2021. It is therefore an appropriate time to assess the extent to which DFAT and MFAT's investment in OPOC has been an effective way to assist advocacy and attention to Pacific Ocean priorities, decisions and processes at national, regional and international levels. The results of the evaluation will help inform both DFAT and MFAT on options for future support and may also be informative for the Pacific Forum Leaders and the new SG and POC (yet to be appointed), who should take up the role from January 2021.

This is a formative evaluation, whereby the evaluation is intended to inform consideration of future options and continuous improvement based on analysis of the experiences and results achieved to date.

² Christelle Pratt & Hugh Govan, *Our Sea of Islands, Our Livelihoods, Our Oceania: Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape: a catalyst for implementation of ocean policy*, November 2010.

³ Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner Concept Note and Provisional Work Plan 2017 – 2020.

⁴ The total value of Australia and New Zealand's grant to OPOC is AUD 2,780,000, which comprises contributions from both Australia (AUD 690,000) and New Zealand (AUD 2,090,000). Note French Polynesia and Spain also provide funding for OPOC.

1.2 Report Structure

This document sets out the findings of the OPOC Evaluation conducted over October – November 2020. While the primary audience is POC and OPOC, DFAT and MFAT, and the Forum leaders, it is a short, concise report intended for wide readership. It responds to and is structured according to the evaluation questions,⁵ and concludes with recommendations for future support for OPOC. The report also presents three brief case studies that illustrate OPOC's responsibilities, extent of effectiveness, and ways of working with stakeholders on oceans issues.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation was conducted by three independent consultants whose Terms of Reference can be found in Annex 1. The detailed evaluation methodology is at Annex 2.

Scope of the Evaluation

In-scope

The effectiveness of Australia and New Zealand's investment to support the high-level objectives, expected results, and deliverables of OPOC and how this investment has supported:

- The function, roles and responsibilities of OPOC
- The capacity of OPOC to fulfil its responsibilities and deliver its activities and function
- The partnership agreement and implementation arrangements between OPOC, DFAT and MFAT

Out-of-scope

- The performance of the POC
- The performance of OPOC staff
- The 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape

Approach to Data Collection

To answer the evaluation questions, the methodology featured a mixed-methods approach involving: review of available documentation about OPOC and other relevant policy and development aid program documents; semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (POC, OPOC staff and consultant, PIC representatives, relevant CROP agencies, donors, civil society and United Nations representatives) conducted over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic; application of a Sustainability Framework and Outcome Harvest methodology;⁶ and validation discussions to test findings and clarify details with select stakeholders. Where interviews were unable to be completed, short written responses were received from informants.

⁵ Q1: Relevance; Q2: Effectiveness; Q3: Efficiency; Q4: Sustainability; Q5: Gender and Social Inclusion; Q6: Covid-19 Pandemic. The evaluation questions are set out in full in Annex 2.

⁶ Outcome Harvest methodology was applied as a framework to guide the analysis and validation of information collected through enquiry undertaken for each of the evaluation questions. This methodology is a simple and systematic way to enable respondents to identify, formulate, verify, analyse, and interpret outcomes, particularly in programming contexts where relations of cause and effect are complex or depend on a range of factors.

The POC and staff of OPOC were interviewed by the evaluators. Thirty-one representatives from Pacific Island States (8), Australia (3) and New Zealand (2) located at capital and in delegations in the USA were interviewed or responded by written reply (7). Interviews were also completed with four CROP agencies, seven non-government organisations and the UN Special Envoy for Oceans. The full list is provided in Annex 5.

Ethical Considerations

The Evaluators started each interview with a clear description of the purposes of the evaluation and that their participation was voluntary. The Evaluators emphasised that information provided would be treated confidentially, and that there would be no direct attribution of views to any individual. Attribution of information shared by specific countries and organisations was also minimised. Given that most stakeholders were very open about their views and were prepared to provide a critical assessment of the project, the Evaluators consider that this approach was successful.

2. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following paragraphs present the findings of the evaluation. They address the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria including: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency (Financial and Institutional Arrangements), GESI and Sustainability. There is also discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as three brief case studies further examining OPOC's role and effectiveness.

2.1 Relevance

There was consistent agreement from stakeholders that OPOC is relevant for the Pacific as a convenor, coordinator and advocate on oceans issues. OPOC's relevance also comes from the link it provides between regional and international priorities. For example, OPOC helps ensure that Pacific efforts internationally (such as in New York fora) align with regional priorities and positions. Likewise, OPOC helps in communicating the outcomes of international deliberations to Pacific stakeholders. Interviews indicated that OPOC's relevance will only increase with the growing prominence and importance of the ocean for the Pacific in a range of intersecting economic, environmental, social, cultural, and geo-political issues.

Mandate and Function

In addition to OPOC, several CROP agencies are working on oceans issues, including the Pacific Community (SPC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). Stakeholders reported in this crowded space some overlap and duplication of functions, and at times competition between the agencies. OPOC's relevance within this context is less clear when regional organisations already are taking responsibility for coordination of certain streams of ocean work, and when CROP agencies have broadened their scientific and technical mandate to include policy coordination and advocacy around ocean issues.

Within this crowded and at times contested space, OPOC has demonstrated most relevance when fulfilling its core responsibilities of advocacy and coordination through bringing together the interests and expertise of different regional stakeholders (CROP agencies, civil society and private sector) around new and emerging issues where the mandate does not sit with one regional organisation alone, and until such time that Forum members determine which organisation is best suited to take carriage of a particular issue. Multiple stakeholders cited the example of the BBNJ negotiations as clearly demonstrating OPOC's relevance and effectiveness. OPOC's approach and positive outcomes in the BBNJ context (discussed at Case Study 1 below) are a possible model for other areas where OPOC could fulfil similar coordination responsibilities for priority regional issues.

Overall, there is a divergence in perspectives of stakeholders regarding areas where OPOC's contribution may be most relevant. Stakeholders highlighted sea level rise, climate change and maritime boundaries as areas where OPOC potentially could play a similar coordination role to that of the BBNJ. PICs also indicated that OPOC could provide greater support for coordinating technical inputs and sharing examples of good practice on national ocean-related policies. Other areas suggested by interview informants for OPOC to coordinate include implementation of UNCLOS in the Pacific, offshore energy, greening of shipping, aquaculture, and in progressing certain aspects related to ocean issues of the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy.

Deep-sea mining was raised often in the interviews as an emerging (and contentious) issue for OPOC's possible attention. One view was that OPOC should advise Pacific governments on developing sound legislation (including governing the actions of transnational companies), and that OPOC should also provide scientific and technical advice on the topic. However, OPOC clearly does not have the mandate or capabilities to provide technical inputs, and it would not be appropriate to introduce this capability that already exists within SPC. Other informants viewed OPOC as playing a convenor role for deep-sea mining, to facilitate discussion between diverse actors with different points-of-view on the topic, rather than fulfilling a technical role. This suggestion merits consideration as it aligns with OPOC's responsibilities as a coordinator and convenor on new and emergent issues that are not located with other organisations.

The broad range of views expressed points to a broader question about the lack of consistency of view and understanding by stakeholders about OPOC's mandate and function. OPOC, in its 2019 Annual Progress Report articulated that it will continue to focus efforts and target work areas where the staff believe it can be most relevant. This will be done by proactively focusing coordination on new and emerging priority issues that are of regional importance and have been tasked to OPOC by the Leaders. The areas of work should be cross sectoral in nature and ones where there is a gap in coverage by other regional organisations. In the 2020 OPOC Annual Progress Report, staff report that by focusing coordination on new and emerging issues, stakeholders now better recognise and understand the relevance the role of the POC and OPOC. In the report it is noted that feedback received by OPOC from CROP agencies and other state actors indicates that OPOC's place within the regional ocean architecture is becoming clearer.

Regional Coordination Mechanisms

A number of longstanding coordination mechanisms exist within the Pacific regional ocean space. OPOC staff identified in the 2019 Annual Progress Report the importance of OPOC determining the

most relevant approach and useful role for OPOC in relation to these existing mechanisms. One example is the Marine Sector Working Group (MSWG) that is the coordination vehicle at the technical level for CROP agencies on marine and ocean issues. It was established to facilitate coordination between agencies on issues that cross more than two CROP agency agendas. Currently the MSWG is dormant, and to some extent in its absence OPOC has fulfilled some aspects of its coordination function.

The CROP Heads (in 2020) recently decided a review of the MSWG Terms of Reference and a mapping of current work on oceans by CROP agencies be completed by the FFA and SPC that co-chair the group. The outcomes of this review will inform on the future of the MSWG. If the MSWG is reactivated, OPOC staff anticipate that this will assist coordination between OPOC and CROP agencies, and support coordination with other stakeholder groups (national and international) around aspects of ocean management on regional cross-sectoral issues. For this coordination mechanism to work effectively, and to avoid risks of duplication or conflict, it will be important that clear means of communication and cooperation between OPOC and MSWG is established.

In late 2020 through the Leaders directive a new coordination mechanism – the Ocean Taskforce – was established. The POC is co-Chair and OPOC is the Secretariat of the Taskforce that will coordinate regional engagement and advocacy on key international and regional ocean events in 2021. Establishing this Taskforce is an important step forward towards progressing a regionally recognised coordination mechanism, and the prominent role of the POC and OPOC in this Taskforce should help to further enhance visibility and demonstrate their relevance within the region.

2.2 Effectiveness

This section of the report presents the findings of OPOC's progress against its high-level objective (articulated in the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape - FPO) and OPOC's progress against each of the key agreed deliverables articulated in the OPOC Concept Note (2017). The findings of OPOC's progress in supporting the FPO aims, as mandated in the FPO itself is also shared, and by illustration, this section then concludes with three key OPOC case studies.

Progress on OPOC's High-Level Objective

Overall, OPOC has made inconsistent progress towards the expectations articulated in its high-level objective from the FPO: *To provide the necessary high-level representation and commitment needed to ensure dedicated attention and cohesion to ocean priorities, decisions, and processes in the Pacific - at national, regional and international levels.*

The evidence from the Evaluation interviews with stakeholders consistently indicates that OPOC is most effective when its role and purpose in relation to an issue or process is clear and there are sufficient resources and capacity in place to deliver, as was demonstrated by OPOC's role in support of a Pacific regional approach to the BBNJ negotiation process that took place at an international level.

The OPOC Annual Progress Reports (2019 and 2020) provides qualitative output and some outcome information from the OPOC staff perspective. Overall the staff present a positive picture of progress in these reports through examples of results achieved and the resulting impacts. The lessons learned (provided in the 2019 report) and implications in regard to future focus and priorities for OPOC are

helpful and indicate strategies applied by the staff have contributed to improved effectiveness and impactful results in 2020. However, the assessment made by staff regarding OPOC's effectiveness and contribution is not consistently supported by the findings from the stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders identified certain areas of weaknesses of quality and gaps in delivery that do not concur with assessment presented in the Progress Reports. Examples of these areas of weakness is given in the relevant key result areas and in the case studies in the following section of the report.

Key Results against OPOC's Agreed Objectives and Deliverables

OPOC's work is focused around seven deliverables articulated in its Concept Note (2017).

A. Administration and functioning of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner.

OPOC consists of a functioning office comprising three staff and one consultant adviser. Stakeholders recognised the strong commitment and hard work of the staff, and their sensitive and diplomatic approach used in stakeholder engagement and to effectively facilitate processes that help build a regional perspective on what at times are contentious issues.

The office is located within PIFS and delivers administrative functions as mandated. To meet the growing demand and scale of OPOC work, additional budget has been made available by MFAT to increase the level of staffing to assist OPOC to be able to respond to the demand from the region. Due to COVID-19 and the freeze on staff recruitment put in place by PIFS, the hiring of additional personnel that had been planned in 2020 had been put on hold. Further details of the budget are provided below in the Financial and Institutional Arrangements Section.

B. Promoting ocean policy coordination and advocacy across the Pacific region, in close coordination with other regional agencies and organisations in CROP and the POA.

OPOC is known by national and regional stakeholders in the Pacific as the coordination point on Pacific Ocean matters. Overall, OPOC's coordination approach is based around specific events or initiatives, and communication is through email updates on specific relevant issues that is disseminated through the POA member distribution list. Positive individual working relationships further helps to maintain informal links and communication. OPOC facilitated cooperation between POA members (CROP and civil society) and drew on their capabilities to provide technical advice and support in the development of information material and presentations at the 2019 POA conference, and for the Blue Pacific Ocean Report (2020). Both of these significant activities helped strengthened coordination between regional stakeholders and to generate a more holistic view of the scope of ocean issues and improved shared understanding about the progress made and where there is dissent of perspectives, and challenges within the region.

Beyond these initiatives, OPOC does not have a routine system of institutional engagement between the various key agencies and CSO members of the POA. The newly formed Ocean Taskforce should help to provide a more consistent and systematic approach for engagement and advocacy between the broad range state and non-state agencies and organisations.

The issue of equitable and fair representation of members in POA events was raised in the Blue Pacific Ocean Report (2020). The report noted that all of the POA meetings have been held in Fiji, in a regional hub where many of the CROP organisations and big international NGOs have representation. Government representative island members are usually provided travel support to attend meetings,

but other stakeholders must cover their own cost. As a result, the information shared, and topics discussed may not adequately represent the views and expertise of the breadth of the POA members. The change to virtual meetings, in response to travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, has demonstrated the usefulness of online sessions. There is potential for the virtual modality to continue to be employed to help increase inclusivity and representation of the POA.

Under this objective, OPOC reported it has engaged with two national governments (Fiji and PNG) on ocean issues including supporting national policy consultations. During the Evaluation consultations, both national offices noted that they highly appreciated the inputs provided by OPOC. However, the support provided by OPOC had not satisfied certain expectations. One example of a gap in OPOC's support was in coordinating access to information and technical advice for the development of policy and legislative.

C. Ensuring that SDG14 and other closely linked SDGs act as a catalyst for change at regional, national and local levels.

OPOC with the POA, through the PIFS Deputy SG, co-chaired Pacific preparations for the first UN Ocean Conference in 2017 (co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden). Follow-up on the Conference's commitments on SDG14 has been left to individual countries and organisations to progress. OPOC's draft Blue Pacific Report provides a summary of the current situation and progress made on ocean issues during the six-year term of the POC but the report does not refer to any specific OPOC coordination efforts towards implementation of the Conference's agreed targets. The PIF Leaders Statement (December 2020) proposes that in future that the POC will take responsibility for monitoring and reporting on regional ocean commitment, which will assist OPOC working in collaboration with POA members to fulfill the SDG14 reporting requirements.

OPOC has undertaken initiatives on dissemination of SDG14 information including SDGs interlinkages poster to raise awareness and inspire change, and the development of the web-based Ocean Initiatives Portal and Dashboard. When the Dashboard is launched it will provide tracking information and assist reporting at a national and regional level. The tool will support increasing community awareness and knowledge about the SDG14.

D. Developing a multi-stakeholder regional roadmap for building regional and national capacity, to ensure sustainable capacity development.

OPOC's draft Blue Pacific Ocean Report (2020) maps the roles, responsibilities, structures, and systems currently in place within PIF members and at the regional (CROP agency) level. As previously noted, SPC and USP have commenced work on mapping regional and national capacity and in order to avoid duplication OPOC determined not pursue this work as had been planned in 2020. During 2021, OPOC will explore what role it may appropriately take to progress work on development of the roadmap and a strategy for capacity development. OPOC will be mindful to build on the initial work of SPC and USP and avoid the risk of duplication of effort.

E. Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) – promoting and supporting involvement and engagement of Pacific Island Countries in UN negotiations on future management of the High Seas.

Since 2016 OPOC continues to play a key role as Pacific convenor, coordinator and advocate to help present a consistent and unified Pacific regional perspective in the BBNJ, that is an important international legal instrument with wide ranging implications for the management and protection of

the Pacific's ocean resources. Multiple stakeholders commended OPOC for its work, which involves successfully facilitating coordination and information exchange between PICs, their UN missions in New York, CROP agencies, CSOs, and key international advisers and experts. This included facilitating PIC meetings and workshops, preparing briefing packs and communiques for PIC delegates, and managing the logistics of communication and coordination in New York and with the region.

Due to COVID-19, coordination meetings between delegates, experts and coordinators continued using virtual platforms. Although the work continued, some stakeholders commented that momentum of the process slowed. The fourth Inter-Governmental Conference has been postponed from 2020 to a date (to be determined) in mid 2021. OPOC staff noted that the extension of the BBNJ process (that had been expected to be completed in 2020) will require additional financial resources and staff time.

F. Ocean financial assessment and readiness to improve resourcing and implementation, for FPO implementation – in close coordination with PIFS responsibilities to coordinate implementation of the Pacific Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Development.

The Pacific Ocean Finance Fellowship Program is an activity under the Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program (PROP), funded by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility and implemented through the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and OPOC. This integrated program of training, financial support and mentoring took place between June 2019 and March 2020, including a workshop (November 2019) that brought together national, regional and wider international expertise.

This Program has produced technical reports and supported increase in awareness and understanding amongst the 12 participants on issues related to ocean finance which is a new area in the Pacific region. Drawing on the knowledge gained from the Program, Tonga has completed a pilot project on the relevance of ocean finance at a national level which has the potential to be replicated in other PICs.

The Leaders have identified that ocean financing is an area that OPOC should continue to prioritise, and there is now a cohort of PIC representatives with relevant capacity that going forward OPOC can engage in this work.

G. Maritime boundaries and sea-level rise - arrange and contribute to workshops and meetings to develop negotiating positions and coordinate and develop policy advice for the PIF membership as per the 2019-2020 PIF International Engagement and Advocacy strategy.

OPOC has participated in the coordination meetings and workshops on this priority issue for the region. However, given that other well qualified and experienced actors are already engaged in this area of work, stakeholders expressed mixed views about the specific additional value and contribution that OPOC can make on this matter. For example, SPC is the lead technical agency and leads coordination of a consortium with membership from CROP agencies, international expert advisors and the PIFS legal team. Other stakeholders are of the view that OPOC is still well placed to contribute to these areas through the POC's high-level access and potential to influence decision-makers within the region and internationally. Arguably the SG, with the support of PIFS can advocate political leaders to progress the issue within the region, while the specific role of the POC with OPOC's support would be better placed to focus on advocacy and lobbying internationally beyond the region.

Progress Towards the Aims of the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (FPO)

The FPO monitoring report card was first completed in 2016. In 2020 OPOC facilitated an update of the monitoring process using the 2016 as baseline data and additional indicators (23 indicators in 2020 compared to 14 in 2016) that reflect the new areas of ocean work that have commenced in the intervening time. OPOC undertook an open call out to CROP agencies to contribute to the report card which was included in the Blue Pacific Ocean Report (2020). Different secondary data sources for the period 2017 – 2020 from donors, partner agencies were used, and the analysis was completed for each of the FPO themes and for the SDG 14 goals.

Based on the qualitative analysis completed, a rating of the change for each of the FPO indicators for the period 2017 – 2020 was reported. Of the 23 indicators, three were rated as making significant positive change, four as little or no change, one as negative change, and the remaining fifteen was rated as making moderately positive change.

Overall progress is reported (based on OPOC staff assessment) in five of the six FPO indicators that relate to OPOC's responsibilities (Table 1). The assessments presented in the report card overall aligns with the findings presented in OPOC's own Progress Reports (described in the Section on Objectives and Deliverables). Analysis within the Blue Pacific Report notes that although progress has been made in the number of ocean policies established, a stronger evidence base on which policies are developed, and more systematic documentation of policy status and progress to inform a more coordinated and strategic policy response within the region is needed. These are areas of work that fit well within OPOC's priorities.

Table 1. Assessment of change (2017 – 2020) of FPO indicators related to OPOC

Significant Positive Change	Moderate Positive Change	Little / no change
Number of Ocean policies established for implementation in Pacific Island Countries Number of ocean initiatives with capacity building focus implemented in the Pacific	Proportion of organisation types and sectors represented on the POA list Relative proportion of participation by regional, national and local level stakeholders at POA face-to-face meetings Number of open regional and sub-regional organisations ocean forums held	Number of political/country statements that reinforce or promote the FPO's role in the regional ocean policy framework

The little / no change reported in national statements related to FPO's role may be improved through the work that OPOC intends to take forward with PICs in establishing national focal points on oceans and continuing to coordinate support on national level policies. The lack of progress in this indicator may also reflect the views of regional stakeholders in regard to the FPO. In the Evaluation consultations, many respondents did note that the FPO was adopted a decade ago, and that given the changes in context and priorities it may be appropriate to review its enduring relevance and if there

is need for revision of the framework. As the FPO is outside the scope of this evaluation, the Evaluators did not pursue this line of enquiry further.

Case Studies

Stakeholders consistently referred to three examples of OPOC's work in illustrating their assessments of OPOC's effectiveness. Those three examples are presented briefly below as case studies.

Case Study 1: Coordination of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Negotiations

Multiple stakeholders commended OPOC for its work as convenor, coordinator and advocate to help the Pacific present a consistent regional perspective in the BBNJ negotiations, an important international legal instrument with wide ranging implications for the management and protection of the Pacific's ocean resources. OPOC's work in the negotiations included facilitating PIC meetings and workshops, preparing briefing packs and communiques for PIC delegates, and managing the logistics of communication and coordination in New York and with the region. OPOC also facilitated the contribution of technical advice by CROP agencies, CSOs, and international advisers, and the management of dedicated funding support provided by DFAT and MFAT.

The success of OPOC's contribution to the BBNJ negotiations demonstrated how effective it can be when there is clarity around OPOC's role, and it is resourced adequately to allocate dedicated staff with the required expertise. The case study also demonstrated the value of OPOC's neutrality and independence in helping PICs reach unified positions on complex issues.

Case Study 2: Convening the Pacific Ocean Alliance Conference, October 2019

The POA is an open-ended, voluntary information-sharing and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism between PICs, CROP agencies, civil society and the private sector, established by Forum Leaders through the 2010 Framework of the Pacific Oceanscape (FPO). The POA's aim is to provide the region with effective ocean policy coordination and implementation, and to facilitate cooperation on important and transboundary ocean issues that require multi-stakeholder attention. OPOC in 2015 convened a POA conference that focused on the BBNJ. This meeting provided an opportunity for the POA members to engage with and be involved in the initial stages of the BBNJ process, noting that as the BBNJ negotiation process progresses and has become more politically sensitive, appropriately the POA's involvement lessened.

A second conference was convened in Suva in October 2019. OPOC managed the development of the conference program, coordinating logistical arrangements, facilitating technical input from CROP agencies and other experts, and supporting the participation by the POC and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Oceans. The conference demonstrated OPOC's ability as convenor, coordinator and advocate on Pacific oceans issues. and resulted in.

Although the conference provided a forum for meaningful information sharing between different stakeholders from across the region, participating officials from CROP agencies and member countries expressed that they were on certain issues constrained and felt unable to debate or contribute to discussions in the open forum that included members from civil society organisations. This limited progress made in discussions around key contentious issues. It was determined that a different process and alternative forums may in the future help POA members within their stakeholder groups to explore and form positions on certain issues (e.g CROP agencies through the MSWG or through meetings of Forum Leaders / Ministers), and then facilitate discussions in the larger multi-stakeholder

forum. Taking this approach may help facilitate more constructive discussions and effective exchange of views between the different POA members.

Case Study 3: Preparation of the draft Blue Pacific Report, 2020

OPOC has prepared, on behalf of the POC, a draft version of the Blue Pacific Report that provides a summary of the current situation and progress made on ocean issues during the six-year term of the POC. The report serves as a monitoring and status report and sets the scene for informing and maintaining momentum on critical regional and international processes and commitments. The draft was prepared by OPOC with the POC in coordination with members and CROP agencies. The final report is expected to be presented to the Forum Leaders in early 2021 at a date yet to be confirmed.

The process of completing the report has provided a strong basis for more regular ongoing collection and dissemination of monitoring data. For example, OPOC developed a Comprehensive Register of Initiatives when collating information for the Report. The register/portal is now online in the OPOC website and once additional technical capacity has been sourced, the information will be uploaded and a system that will allow stakeholders to register their own relevant initiatives for reporting and communication purposes will be developed. Although the FPO (2010) does not require OPOC to provide progress reports, through subsequent communiqués, Leaders have tasked this responsibility to OPOC. Strengthening and regularising the FPO reporting process will also support the SDG14 reporting obligations which OPOC in collaboration with POA is responsible for.

The process for drafting the report demonstrates OPOC's ability as a convenor, coordinator and advocate on Pacific oceans issues, though input from some PICs and CROPs was limited by resource constraints, and some stakeholders flagged the need for longer timeframes and simpler processes to more effectively contribute to the report's next iteration. Similarly, the Blue Pacific Report does not articulate OPOC's coordination efforts towards implementation of the targets agreed at the UN Ocean Conference (2017), nor does it map or measure progress towards greater capacity development in the region

2.3 Efficiency - Financial and Institutional Arrangements

Budget

The total budget allocated to OPOC by DFAT and MFAT for the period 2018 to 2021 is AUD 2,780,000. Initially each provided AUD 832,700, which in 2017 was determined to be sufficient to cover the costs of OPOC's scope of activities and operational costs. In 2019, additional funds were provided by MFAT to enable OPOC to meet the identified oceans coordination and advocacy requirements of the region. The additional investment was designated to advance OPOC's work on maritime boundaries, progress participation of the Pacific in the BBNJ negotiations, and to ensure the POA conference fulfilled its objectives of convening stakeholders in the ocean space and to foster partnerships around ocean-related priorities⁷. In 2017, DFAT contributed (through a separate service agreement) an additional AUD 100,000 (later increased to AUD 300,000, 2017-21) specifically to assist Pacific Small Island Developing States with travel and accommodation costs involved in participating in the BBNJ negotiation process.

⁷ MFAT Concept Note (2018)

OPOC has also obtained additional financial and human resource capacity through designated project funding. One example is Component 3 on Sustainable Ocean Financing of the FFA managed World Bank funded PROP that provided funds for activities and recruitment of a project staff that was shared between FFA and OPOC. To support cost efficiencies, effectiveness and sustainability, OPOC has also drawn on expertise from CROP agencies, PIFs and other POA members for specific tasks and inputs. Additional funds from the Government of Spain have contributed to operational costs, and funds from French Polynesia have paid for an ongoing policy consultant position.

Expenditure

The rate of expenditure reported⁸ in November 2020 of funds approved and transferred through the funding agreement with MFAT and DFAT is at 49.3%. A similar level of under-expenditure (49.5%) was reported for the period January 2018 to October 2019. OPOC attributes this to the office only being fully staffed and operational since mid 2019 and the financial report reflects the additional funding provided by MFAT in 2019. Only 15.1% of the additional funds provided by MFAT in 2019 had been expended by November 2020.

COVID-19 context has contributed to lower than planned expenditure during 2020. Due to the pandemic, major global events that would have involved significant regional preparation (estimated budget AUD 946,000) have been postponed to 2021, and PIFS imposed a freeze on staff recruitment to manage their financial constraints. Expenditure of the MFAT allocation on SLR impacts on maritime boundaries did not progress due to the changes in PIFS' staff recruitment policy, and OPOC has relied on staff capacity rather than drawing on external personnel to complete major inputs in 2020 including the BBNJ, the Blue Pacific Ocean Report and the establishment of the Ocean TaskForce.

Staff Resources

Overall, both staff and stakeholders interviewed assess that OPOC's small office (only three personnel) is insufficient to effectively fulfill its current regional coordination, convening and communication responsibilities. OPOC's staff note that the coordination and convening role they fulfill is time consuming and requires high levels of diplomacy and refined and sensitive communication skills that are grounded in sound knowledge of ocean policy and technical matters globally, regionally and nationally. The OPOC staff also note that there are high administrative demands, which at times policy and program staff need to undertake due to insufficient administrative support capacity within their team.

OPOC staff, as well as certain stakeholders, identified that the additional staff resources (already approved and provided for in the budget) are needed for OPOC to effectively meet current and short-term future demand and deliver the scope and scale of approved activities within timeframes articulated in the work plan. Examples of the activities where additional professional resources are needed are: to provide satisfactory support to the BBNJ process that is now ongoing to 2021; to progress the program of work on ocean finance; to support on national ocean policies; to progress the national and regional capacity roadmap; and to fulfill the secretariat responsibilities for the recently formed Ocean Taskforce.

As ocean matters become increasingly prominent for the Pacific, the need for convening and communication across key stakeholders will only continue to rise. Both staff and stakeholders assess

⁸ OPOC Annual Progress Reports (2019 and 2020)

that OPOC will need to be further resourced with a suitable mix of expertise and experience to meet this rising demand. In the event of lifting of the recruitment freeze by PIFS, both staff and stakeholders see most value in assigning new resources to engage an additional senior OPOC policy officer (whether through recruitment or secondment). An additional senior officer would assist in increasing the prominence of the representation and advocacy role of the POC and help to deliver on OPOC's coordination and convening objectives within the region and more widely at international fora. OPOC staff also identified the need for additional administration staff to reduce the administrative responsibilities that OPOC's senior policy and program staff currently undertake.

The idea of improving OPOC's access to regional professional and technical capacity was raised during the Evaluation consultations. Currently OPOC seeks technical inputs from CROP agencies and from POA members (for example for the BBNJ work, the Blue Pacific Ocean report and for the POA conference). There is potential to expand access to the skills and capacity that is available within the region through secondment or a fee for service arrangement, for example by drawing on national capacity now available in 12 PICS in the area of ocean finance and by accessing relevant technical capabilities within CROP agencies and civil society organisations.

Institutional Arrangements

Stakeholders consistently expressed the view that OPOC's relevance and purpose would be clearer if its institutional relationships within PIFS, and its place within the broader ocean governance architecture in the region, were clarified. There is however diversity of views about the relative value of the type of relationship between OPOC and PIFS. Some noted that OPOC's co-location within PIFS elevates OPOC's importance, visibility and influence by strengthening its proximity to the SG / POC and PIF Leaders. However, others noted that OPOC being positioned within PIFS may actually limit its independence and neutrality, which would otherwise be key to OPOC efforts to facilitate regional compromise and consensus, coordinate negotiation processes, and drive new thinking and initiatives not mandated by leaders.

Additionally, and outside the scope of this evaluation, a number of stakeholders raised the possibility of the POC being separated from the role of SG, given the prominence and scope of work on ocean issues within the region and internationally. By way of background, it is understood that when the role of POC was created it was intended as an interim and a cost-effective measure for the role to sit with the SG. In raising the possible splitting of the role, stakeholders flagged several issues including: whether the dual SG/POC workload can effectively be managed by one person; the advantage of having the POC role sit with the high-profile role of the SG; and whether the SG being POC constrains innovation in OPOC's work (i.e., whether OPOC only responds to the Forum Leaders' priorities as conveyed by the SG, and whether a separate POC could help OPOC to use evidence-based advocacy to inform and influence leaders). Some informants also flagged the possibility of increasing the responsibility of the Deputy Secretary General of PIFS to support the SG fulfil their POC role. This issue is for the Forum Leaders and members to determine.

In the meantime, a key finding of this evaluation is that if OPOC's institutional arrangements cannot be clarified and its resourcing expanded, real and growing questions will continue to emerge over the medium to longer term around OPOC's effectiveness in improving the Pacific region's management of ocean issues. These are not new matters. Any revisions to OPOC's institutional arrangements will ultimately be subject to the wider discussion on regional ocean governance among PIF leaders, guided

by the SG and the POC. But while the increased prominence of ocean issues means the region's governance deliberations are now more pressing than ever, COVID-19 also makes it more difficult than ever to prioritise this issue, take necessary actions in the short term, and develop a clearer vision and strategy for the long term.

While these broader discussions play out, OPOC staff need to continue to actively consult PIF members and engage with other regional stakeholders when setting OPOC priorities, and delivery strategies (including cooperation, and capacity and resource sharing), which must also be endorsed and approved by the POC. This will help maximise OPOC effectiveness and value-add, particularly while its small office continues to operate at stretched capacity.

2.4 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Interviews confirmed quite strong OPOC participation by women, including a female POC, gender equality among the OPOC staff and consultant, and female delegates engaged in the BBNJ negotiations. On the other hand, there were no specific inputs around disability inclusion.

The above results arose without any formal strategy to guide gender and disability inclusion in OPOC's work, though OPOC's funding arrangement⁹ between PIFS and DFAT specifies adherence to DFAT's policies on gender and disability inclusion,¹⁰ and many of OPOC's key partners (CROP agencies, CSOs and PIFS) bring their own GESI commitments to the partnership.

Notwithstanding the above, there is an opportunity to ensure GESI is explicitly addressed in OPOC's future coordination, communication, and advocacy responsibilities. This would require clearer articulation in future DFAT and MFAT funding agreements on their expectations for OPOC's GESI efforts, with a view to potentially guiding OPOC in the development of a simple GESI strategy and implementation plan.

2.5 COVID-19 Pandemic

In the COVID-19 context, stakeholders have identified challenges progressing work without face-to-face meetings due to travel restrictions and associated work-from-home arrangements. Some informants emphasised the importance of face-to-face meetings for building relationships in the Pacific as key to achieving outcomes. The pandemic has also required OPOC to shift its focus due to the postponement of key activities such as the BBNJ Intergovernmental Conference, and the cancellation of key events like the 2020 POA Conference. As OPOC would ordinarily be a key Pacific stakeholder in these events, their cancellation or postponement has impacted on OPOC's relevance for the region.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, OPOC has continued its planned work on the report to PIF Leaders on the "State of the Blue Pacific Ocean" and draft Blue Pacific Ocean Declaration. OPOC has also used

⁹ Grant Arrangement between DFAT and PIFS for the Funding for the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC), on 22 December 2017 (DFAT Arrangement No. 70141/16).

¹⁰ DFAT, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*, February 2016; DFAT, *Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*, May 2015.

technology effectively to limit COVID's impact on its work, including by updating the OPOC website, increasing communication through social media (Facebook and Twitter) and hosting webinars ("PIF Blue Pacific Talanoa Series: Webinars for the People") — this helps maintain regional interest and momentum on oceans issues.

Still, the cancellation or postponement of major events and related costs means OPOC is set to record a significant underspend, which presents opportunities for a realignment of OPOC resources in the immediate term (as discussed above). Some informants also noted that the pandemic provides an opportunity for OPOC to take stock and develop a longer term workplan.

2.6 Sustainability

Stakeholders reported a diversity of views about the extent to which conditions for OPOC's sustainability are evident. Overall, there are positive indications that progress towards certain conditions for sustainability has been achieved, and interviewees collectively rated the progress towards OPOC's sustainability at 59%. OPOC staff gave the highest rating score (69%), followed by PICs (64%), CROP agencies (60%) and DFAT / MFAT (59%). Representatives from CSOs gave the lowest overall rating (52%).

The sustainability elements consistently rated **highest** as being present were:

- OPOC is known as the regional coordination point on ocean matters
- OPOC's priorities reflect those of PICs
- OPOC is responsive to the emerging issues and priorities of PICs, and
- The presence of technical and or relevant information resources from within the region that assists OPOC to deliver its work priorities

The sustainability elements consistently rated as **less well established** were:

- The investment of regional and national resources in OPOC through PIFS and other sources (i.e. beyond that provided by Australia, NZ and other development partners)
- The willingness and enthusiasm from within the region that helps OPOC to deliver its work priorities
- Stakeholders are clear about OPOC's purpose and mandate
- Stakeholders are clear about the roles and responsibilities of OPOC staff
- The roles and responsibilities of OPOC have and continue to evolve in response to changes in context and priorities of PICs

Overall, these findings indicate that OPOC still needs to invest more in improving the conditions most likely to support its own future sustainability. This includes continuing to work closely with PICs and being more responsive to their priorities, with a view to more clearly demonstrating OPOC's relevance and strengthening demand for its coordination and convening role in the region. The results indicate that OPOC also needs to seek ways to engage more effectively with the CSOs, including to help manage and deliver on their expectations. An option worth consideration is to access support from the European Union investment to PIFS on CSO engagement. As discussed above, stakeholders will also benefit from a clearer articulation and communication of OPOC's mandate and purpose (though this depends in part on the broader discussions around OPOC role within the regional oceans governance architecture).

Stakeholders also floated the potential for stronger collaboration with the CROP agencies to support OPOC's forward sustainability, by better accessing and leveraging their technical capacity within region and at global fora. However, given the financial and human resource constraints faced by CROP agencies due to COVID-19, any such collaboration may require OPOC to provide some form of reimbursement (previously discussed in this report) to ensure continued access to CROP agencies' technical capabilities.

Likewise, given COVID-19's exacerbation of state funding constraints in the region, there may be value in exploring partnerships with other bilateral donors (e.g. Norway) or philanthropic organisations that have shared interests in Pacific Ocean matters. But any such efforts at diversifying and broadening OPOC's funding base will become easier when OPOC's mandate and purpose is clarified.

Annex 5 provides more details of the results of the sustainability assessment.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the evaluation findings, the Evaluators make the following conclusions:

- **OPOC is highly relevant for the Pacific through its professional support of the POC and its functions as a convenor, coordinator and advocate, and the link it makes between priority regional and international ocean issues.** Its relevance will continue to increase with the growing prominence and importance of the ocean for the Pacific region in a range of intersecting policy and program areas.
- **The value of OPOC is not universally recognised or endorsed by regional stakeholders who hold a diversity of views regarding the policy areas that OPOC should to engage on and contribute to.** By adopting a focused approach and through more consistent engagement with stakeholders (for example through the BBNJ process), OPOC has started to better articulate and demonstrate its value within the crowded and contested space of ocean policy in the Pacific.
- **A sufficient level of funding for staffing and operations of OPOC has been provided by MFAT and DFAT, however (due to a freeze on recruitment by PIFS), the current staffing levels are insufficient to support consistent quality and well-time delivery of the approved program of work.** Additional human resource capacity is required for OPOC to be well placed to effectively meet future demands.
- **As the prominence and the scale and scope of ocean work regionally and internationally continues to increase, the institutional arrangements that were put in place in 2010 as an interim measure (whereby OPOC is located within PIFS and the role of POC sits with the SG) warrant review within the current context.** While co-location supports cost efficiencies, the current arrangements may slow certain processes and limit the ability of OPOC to effectively support the POC to advocate and drive new thinking and initiatives within outside the region.
- **Further efforts are required to strengthen the conditions that will support the forward sustainability of OPOC.** Increasing commitment and understanding of OPOC's role and contribution by PICs, CROP agencies and CSO stakeholders within the region, seeking ways to diversify funding to manage the current high dependence on MFAT and DFAT are critical conditions towards sustainability that need to be enhanced.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, this report makes three core recommendations, supplemented by three additional recommendations. These six recommendations are accompanied by possible actions to foster their implementation, divided into short-term (one to two years) and longer-term actions (two to five years).

Core Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Clarify OPOC's mandate, priorities and responsibilities and strategically engage and communicate these clearly to key stakeholders, with a view to gaining stronger stakeholder commitment on engagement with the POC and OPOC and contributing guidance in setting forward workplans.

Proposed short-term actions:

- The POC transition provides an opportunity to review and redefine OPOC's mandate through consultation with PICs, CROP agencies, CSOs, the outgoing POC and Forum Leaders.
- OPOC to develop a short, simple strategy that articulates its purpose, areas of focus, and ways of working, which can be circulated among key regional and international stakeholders.
- OPOC to establish a system for regular consultations with Forum Leaders (for example reinstate an update from the POC as a standing item on the FOC agenda) and engage other stakeholders (such as through the POA structure) to review progress against OPOC's mandate.
- OPOC staff to design a simple framework for monitoring its performance and sharing key findings with stakeholders annually in a simple, accessible dashboard format.

Proposed longer-term action:

- Forum Leaders and the POC to commission a thorough review of OPOC's mandate and purpose, to maximise its convening power and policy coordination role.

Recommendation 2: Refine the POC and OPOC's institutional arrangements to align with OPOC's clarified mandate (Recommendation 1 above).

Proposed short-term actions:

- OPOC to remain in PIFS given the POC role is anticipated to be held by the SG of PIFS, and these arrangements offer crucial cost efficiencies and easier access to the region's political processes.
- The incoming SG / POC to table for Forum Leaders' consideration the possibility of the POC being assisted by an additional senior officer (whether through recruitment, secondment or expansion of existing duties), given the significant workload facing the SG and the Deputy SG positions, and the potential value of more consistent senior engagement with regional and international stakeholders.

Proposed longer-term action:

- Forum Leaders and the POC to explore possible longer-term reform of regional ocean governance architecture, POC and OPOC institutional arrangements to ensure arrangements are effective, efficient and complementary across organisations.

Recommendation 3: Provide OPOC with the requisite budget and staffing profile (covering policy, technical, communications, and administrative skills) to effectively deliver on OPOC's agreed scope of work in the short-term. Over the longer term, ensure OPOC's budget and staffing profile remains aligned with any revisions to OPOC's mandate (per Recommendations 1 and 2 above).

Proposed short-term actions:

- Repurpose savings in the current budget (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to address immediate gaps in staff capacity (such as to develop OPOC's mandated multi-stakeholder regional roadmap for building regional and national capacity).
- OPOC to explore options to strengthen access to quality technical expertise, whereby the CROP agencies establish a finance facility to support a draw down panel of regional and international expertise, secondment of personnel from within the region, and a mechanism to cost share or reimburse the CROP agencies and CSOs that contribute technical services to support the work of OPOC.
- OPOC to explore options for accessing additional donor funding from new bilateral and multilateral donors, international NGOs, private sector organisations and philanthropic foundations.

Supplemental recommendations:

Recommendation 4: Strengthen collaboration with the POA: there is potential for OPOC to more effectively draw on POA resources and engage with POA members to help inform OPOC's work. But given POA membership is a 'broad church', a clear OPOC / POA delineation is essential to limit duplication, confusion and even tension. Implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2 above should assist with OPOC / POA delineation, enabling stronger OPOC / POA collaboration over the medium term.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen GESI: upon implementation of Recommendations 1-3 above, OPOC should consider developing a simple GESI strategy and implementation plan to ensure OPOC incorporates GESI when planning and delivering events, thematic areas and communications. Noting OPOC's limited resources, advisors from PIFS, DFAT and/or MFAT could potentially support this process.

Proposed short-term action:

- OPOC staff to liaise with GESI advisers within PIFS, DFAT and/or MFAT to seek advice on incorporating GESI considerations into OPOC's existing workplan.

Proposed longer-term action:

- Once Recommendations 1, 2 & 3 have been addressed, OPOC to develop a simple GESI strategy and implementation plan.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in relation to OPOC's performance, to ensure it remains aligned to emerging regional priorities. These efforts should be tied to OPOC's work developing its website and dashboard for tracking ocean initiatives that align with the strategic priorities of the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (FPO).

Proposed short-term action:

- OPOC staff to develop a simple MEL plan as part of the next OPOC work planning process that is time and resource efficient to implement.

Influencing Contextual Factors

The evaluation team recognises there are contextual factors which create opportunities and challenges for implementing the report's recommendations above. These factors have influenced the approaches and timing for the proposed recommendations. The factors include:

- **Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**, particularly on health and food security, adverse financial and economic impacts, and risks to social and political stability.
- **Transition to a new SG / POC** from January 2021 and the assumption that, unless Forum Leaders determine differently, the two positions will continue to be held by the same person.
- **The PIF Chair role rotating to Fiji** in 2021.
- **The clear separation between OPOC's coordination and advocacy role**, and the technical role fulfilled by CROP agencies.
- Opportunities from the **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the development of the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent** to better coordinate and convene the Pacific in support of improved conditions for sustainable development of the ocean.

ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

ANNEX 2: EVALUATION PLAN

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND WRITTEN GUIDE

ANNEX 4: EVALUATION RESPONDENTS

ANNEX 5: SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

All annexes have been submitted to DFAT separately and are available on request.