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Pacific Islands Roundtable
for Nature Conservation



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Vemööre Declaration

Commitments to nature conservation action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021-2025

Vemööre¹ Declaration: Commitments to nature conservation action in the Pacific islands region, 2021-2025

Preamble

We, representatives of the governments of 14² Pacific island countries and territories, our partner countries, and the Heads of Organisations of 11³ members of the Pacific Islands Round Table for Nature Conservation, gathered for the High-Level Session of the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, declare that the global biodiversity crisis is urgent, and that transformative action must not be delayed. This crisis is an existential threat to our Pacific Ocean, our Pacific islands, and to ourselves as Pacific peoples.

We join world leaders that met at the UN Summit on Biodiversity 2020 and recognised the current planetary emergency of interdependent crises of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and climate change that requires urgent and immediate global action.

We note with grave concern that none of the global 2011-2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets have been fully met. The Blue Pacific collectively calls for all countries to adopt a strong deal for nature and people, to reverse or halt the loss of our natural ecosystems and put nature on a path to recovery by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the dependency of all our societies on healthy and resilient natural ecosystems. Our necessary social and economic recovery from the pandemic is a regional and global opportunity to transform our collective relationship with the natural world, and to build back better.

We recognize the potential of our Pacific islands to lead the world in ecological stewardship, drawing on our rich indigenous heritage and the close relationship of our communities with the land, sea and sky.

We welcome the Leaders Pledge for Nature: United to Reverse Biodiversity Loss by 2030 for Sustainable Development and its ten commitments. We are committed to full and integrated implementation of the many existing international and regional efforts to address the biodiversity crisis, including the *Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021-2025, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework*. In this Declaration we recognise, endorse and commit to implementing 21 priority Action Tracks by 2025 to ensure the recovery and flourishing of both nature and people in the Blue Pacific.

1. 'Vemööre' is a term in the Kwényi language from the Isle of Pines, New Caledonia, that refers to making something viable. It is used to highlight our collective commitment and responsibility to implement the principles of life, to preserve balance, to build alliances, and to respect the word between people and between the spirits of our environment. Vemööre is also close to the notion of resilience.

2. In attendance at the virtual High-level segment of the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas for the Pacific island Country and Territories was the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna. Partner countries attending were Australia, France, and New Zealand. Remaining countries and territories not able to attend will be invited to endorse.

3. Pacific island Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT) members present were BirdLife International, , cChange Pacific, Conservation International, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Oceania Regional Office, The Nature Conservancy, Pacific Community, Protected Area Learning Research Collaborative (PALRC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - New Caledonia, and World Wide Fund for Nature-Pacific.



Our Ocean

Photo: © Ocean Ventures Fiji

Our Ocean

Our Pacific Ocean is the foundation of our cultures, livelihoods and identities: our source of life. As island peoples we understand that we have obligations towards our ancestral ocean which supports and sustains us, both within and beyond our national jurisdictions. The ocean is inseparable from Pacific peoples, cultures, economies and societies all of which are endangered by global and local threats including climate change, acidification, overfishing, plastics and other pollution, and unsustainable use and management of deep sea resources.

We reaffirm the regional ocean policy instruments already adopted by the Blue Pacific, and recommit to strengthened implementation of these. We likewise reaffirm the central role of our traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge in making wise decisions about our shared ocean.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

1. Expanding our networks of **marine protected areas** (MPAs), including locally managed marine areas, and other area-based effective conservation measures. We will ensure that our MPA networks are ecologically representative, sustainably and effectively managed and resourced, community-led, and socially equitable.
2. Maintaining and restoring **marine ecosystem integrity**, recognising the importance of threatened or significant ecosystems and habitats, such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds, to our environmental, economic, and cultural wellbeing. Underpinned by community led management approaches we commit to managing,

reducing, and eventually eliminating locally derived threats to marine ecological health, connectivity, and functioning.

3. Safeguarding our **threatened and migratory species**, recognising that the decline or loss of key species will fundamentally and irrevocably alter our oceanic ecosystems, livelihoods and cultural heritage.
4. **Ending unsustainable fishing** in nearshore and pelagic waters, including the high seas. We commit to continued and urgent action on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which threatens marine ecosystems, livelihoods, human rights, and development opportunities in the Pacific.
5. **Preventing marine pollution** by eliminating sources of discharge within our region, transitioning to circular island economies, and advocating internationally for Pacific Rim polluters to improve consumption and waste practices. We reaffirm the Kainaki II Declaration for our Pacific commitment to work to protect our ocean from harmful plastics through our Pacific Regional Marine Litter Action Plan 2018-2025, notably its support for the development of a global legal framework to address marine litter.
6. Entrenching a precautionary approach to any proposed **deep-sea and seabed mining** activities. We acknowledge the imperative for responsible stewardship of deep-sea and seabed environments in our national jurisdictions and on the high seas.



Our Islands

Rock Islands, Palau. Photo: © Stuart Chape

Our Islands

As Pacific peoples, our islands are our homes. Our forests, soils, and wetlands have supported our societies for millennia, and our cultures, stories, and identities are inseparable from our lands. Multiple global and local pressures now pose existential risks to our islands, our people, and our ecologies: these include climate change, invasive species, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, wildfires, degradation and fragmentation of our ecosystems and pandemics.

The health of our islands is intimately intertwined with that of our ocean and our people. We must work with our communities and partners to address multiple threats, and achieve multiple benefits, by working towards whole-domain environmental management across land and sea.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

7. Strengthening our networks of **terrestrial protected areas**, including community-based areas utilising sustainable customary management practices. We note the importance of protected areas for our indigenous biodiversity, livelihoods, culture and resilience against climate threats.

- 8.** Restoring **terrestrial ecosystem integrity** by reducing and managing threats to our native forests, watersheds and agroecological systems. Traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge plays a key role in actively managing our islands towards restoration of their abundance and ecological functioning.
- 9.** Safeguarding our endemic, **threatened and migratory species**. We stress the need for well-resourced species recovery plans, especially for species of particular ecological, cultural or economic significance.
- 10.** Implementing **nature-based solutions to sustain social-ecological systems** as a fundamental response to climate impacts, disaster risk management, water and food insecurity, and threats to human health.
- 11.** **Battling invasive species** through biosecurity partnerships, sharing knowledge and information, and resourcing to increase management and eradication effectiveness.
- 12.** **Preventing land and freshwater pollution** from industrial, agricultural, household and other sources on our islands, in partnership with communities and businesses.



Our Connection with Nature

Upper Mataniko River, Solomon Islands. Photo: © Stuart Chape

Our Connection with Nature

Our connection to our Pacific environments is expressed in our identities, livelihoods, cultural practices, and traditional, indigenous and local knowledge. It is also reflected in our natural resource-based economies, and we recognise the imperative that these resources are utilised sustainably in all our processes of economic development.

We reaffirm that our communities have the right to free, prior, and informed consent about all place-based nature conservation and economic development initiatives. Our communities also have rights to fair and equitable sharing of the monetary and other benefits of the utilisation of genetic resources.

We stress the central role of traditional knowledge holders, as well as elders, women, and youth, in decisions around environmental management.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

- 13. Putting our people at the heart of conservation**
action by engaging community and civil society organisations, artists, traditional knowledge holders, elders (men and women) and young people, rural and urban, in the design, monitoring, and implementation of conservation initiatives.
- 14. Promoting behaviour change for nature conservation**, based on Pacific values, connection to place, and our traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge. We commit to integrating heritage values

and cultural expressions into conservation initiatives as effective means of transmission of knowledge and raising public awareness of contextual and restorative environmental practices

- 15. Prioritising ecosystem-based approaches to climate change, pandemic and disaster response.** ‘One Health’ solutions which enhance human, animal, and ecological health are crucial for mitigating outbreaks of disease, and provide essential resilience against natural disasters and climate change risks.
- 16. Leading the world in our transition to sustainable and resilient ocean economies** that honour our voyaging heritage and reflect the direct dependence of coastal communities on the sea. We commit to developing and implementing strong and effective national ocean policies, and to ensuring environmental and social best practice in our waters.
- 17. Fostering sustainable and resilient island economies** that reflect our indigenous heritage and values, and further integrating these values and environmental considerations into our national economic planning processes and legal frameworks.
- 18. Ensuring that environmentally and culturally sensitive tourism** is implemented throughout the Pacific.



Implementation

Mangrove replanting. Photo: © SPREP

Implementation

Effective nature conservation for our Pacific Ocean, islands and people depends on effective implementation, and we seek effective and genuine partnerships to support leadership in our communities, governments, civil society and private sector. Committed and culturally grounded leadership is vital for tackling the ultimate and proximate drivers of the environmental crisis in the Pacific and globally.

We recognise, endorse and commit to implementing the following Action Tracks:

19. Increasing science-based target-setting and monitoring, ensuring informed decision-making in our

policy, regulation and strategic planning processes.

20. Reinforcing governance that works for nature conservation and people that is transparent, equitable, and inclusive at community, national, and regional scales. We are committed to a Blue Pacific, regional response to our transboundary threats, and emphasise the global importance of strong environmental leadership that advocates for and from the Pacific.

21. Strengthening financing of nature conservation and nature-based solutions in the Pacific that are resilient in the face of global economic or political disruption.

Call to Action

We state our strong commitment to action and accountability in implementing the urgent economic and societal transformations needed to address the biodiversity crisis that threatens both nature and people in our Pacific islands. Averting this crisis depends not only on action within the Pacific region, but on worldwide cooperation to address the global drivers of environmental change which affect the Pacific so profoundly.

We strongly reaffirm the unique opportunity presented by the negotiation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This must exceed previous frameworks in its scope, ambition, urgency, and ability to catalyse action including linkages to climate change commitments in the Paris Agreement in order to address the interdependent challenges of biodiversity loss, ocean degradation and climate change.

We will ensure that our response to the current health and economic crisis contributes directly to building back better to achieve sustainable societies and we commit to putting biodiversity, climate and environment at the centre of our COVID-19 recovery strategies.

We call on all our regional partners, stakeholders, communities, and governments, as well as countries and non-state actors from around the world, to join the Blue Pacific in adopting and implementing a bold and truly transformational vision for nature and people.

We call on Pacific island countries and territories to endorse the leaders' pledge for nature "United to Reverse Biodiversity Loss by 2030 for Sustainable Development".

We will unite in the lead up to the key international events and processes and will present this Declaration to, and including, the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 7th Our Ocean Conference, the 2nd United Nations Ocean Conference, the IUCN World Conservation Congress, the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Pacific islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, as part of the Blue Pacific's contribution to urgent global action for nature conservation.



Samoa. Photo: © Charles Netzler



Photo: © Charles Netzler