

31st SPREP MEETING OF OFFICIALS

5, 6, and 7 September 2023, Apia, Samoa

Agenda item 9.4.2: Strengthening ocean governance

Purpose of paper:

1. To provide an update on SPREP's work on ocean governance in the region; and
2. To seek Members' endorsement for the Secretariat to develop a regional ocean governance strategic framework for the Secretariat and its Members

Background:

3. Despite their importance, the ocean is facing unprecedented threats as a result of human activities. The health and ability to sustain life is getting worse as the world population grows and human activities increase.
4. Climate change is damaging coral reefs and other key ecosystems; overfishing is threatening the stability of fish stocks; nutrient pollution is contributing to the creation of dead zones; and nearly 80 per cent of the world's wastewater is discharged without treatment.
5. In our region, the Pacific makes up half of the Earth's Ocean and is home to a diverse range of marine species including iconic species of whales and dolphins, dugong, marine turtles, sharks and rays and seabirds.
6. However, despite the Pacific region contributing the least carbon emissions, the region is negatively affected by climate change, sea-level rise and dangerously warming waters caused by climate change changing ecosystems, and fisheries, effecting food security and livelihoods.
7. The Pacific Leaders as a way of showing its commitments to ocean protection in the Pacific Region endorsed the 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent. Ocean and environment protection is one of the key thematic areas of the strategy.
8. In line with the decision by the Pacific Leaders on the 2050 Strategy and the Framework for the Pacific Oceanscape, the SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026 prioritises the protection of our ocean and the services it provides for our Pacific as a cross-cutting theme integrated across the Regional Goals of SPREP Programmes, hence it is a priority of the Secretariat to strengthen its role and efforts on the sustainable management and governance of the ocean and its resources in our region.

SPREP's Role on Ocean Governance

9. Below are some the key activities and programmes that the Secretariat is delivering to support ocean governance in the region.
- Supported the development and implementation of regional frameworks including the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021 – 2025; the Cleaner Pacific 2025; the Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan 2021-2030; the Regional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries and Territories. These frameworks and guidelines all identify ocean related priorities and the commitment from the Pacific countries to work with the Secretariat and partners in their implementation.
 - Supported members to minimise multiple pressures on vulnerable Pacific island ecosystems by implementing ecosystem-based approaches (EbA) to climate change adaptation including responses to ocean acidification and sea level rise. Countries National Adaptation Plans initiated incorporating EbA as part of suite of adaptation solutions.
 - Supported the review and analysis of national environmental laws to mainstream climate change with a focus on coastal and nearshore protection.
 - Supported effective management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems towards healthy oceans supporting sustainable development and to be consistent with international commitments.
 - Minimise the adverse impacts of waste through environmentally sound life cycle management in accordance with agreed regional and international frameworks including Cleaner Pacific 2025
 - Strengthened national sustainable development planning and implementation systems through increased environmental assessment guidelines including EIA, SEA and geo spatial mapping and planning.
 - Providing support to Members on the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.
 - Secretariat to the Noumea Convention which is a comprehensive umbrella legal agreement for the protection, management, and development of the marine and coastal environment of the South Pacific Region. The Noumea Convention is the Pacific region component of UNEP's Regional Seas Programme which aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through the sustainable management and use of marine and coastal environments.
 - Secretariat to the Waigani Convention which is to reduce and eliminate transboundary movements of hazardous and radioactive waste, to minimize the production of hazardous and toxic wastes in the Pacific region and to ensure that

disposal of wastes in the Convention area is completed in an environmentally sound manner

10. At the regional level, the Secretariat continued to collaborate with regional partners and provided technical advice to the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner in the development of the 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent and the recently adopted treaty on the International Legally Binding Instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the Law of the Sea ,
11. The Secretariat has established an internal Ocean Governance Working Group also known as the “Blue Team” to coordinate Ocean works which has a wider scope, however, this need to be strengthened to allow better coordination of ocean works within SPREP for better delivery to Members in collaboration with regional partners.

Strengthening Ocean Governance at SPREP and Way Forward

12. For an effective ocean governance within SPREP, a better coordination at all levels of implementation of ocean work under the SPREP Strategic Plan through its projects and programmes is vital between the Secretariat, Members, and partners.
13. To address this, it is proposed that a SPREP regional ocean governance strategic framework is to be developed in partnership with Members and in consultation with key partners to guide the strengthening of SPREP’s ocean governance and management capacity including its programmes and activities.

Recommendation:

14. The Meeting is invited to:
 - 1) **Note** the work by the Secretariat on Ocean Governance for Members and the region; and
 - 2) **Request** the Secretariat to develop a regional strategic framework for strengthening its capacity on Ocean Governance in consultation with Members, and partners including CROP

03 July 2023