

**Wednesday 29 June 2022**

**Hon. Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Environment and Water, Australia**

**UN Oceans Conference: Plenary speech**

As Australia's Minister for the Environment and Water, I'm honoured to speak here at the United Nations Oceans Conference – my first international summit as Minister.

It's fitting that we meet here in Lisbon, the capital of a great seafaring nation.

A nation whose spirit of exploration took it across the world's oceans, past the tip of northern Australia.

It was a spirit shared by Indigenous Australians – who first sailed to our continent some 65,000 years ago.

Their expedition was so bold, so difficult, so unprecedented, that historians compare it to Neil Armstrong's journey to the moon.

Australians have always felt a deep connection to our oceans.

And you can see why: our island home is blessed with some of world's most stunning marine environments.

But the truth is, our oceans need urgent care.

The impact of climate change is already visible in Australia.

You can see it in shifting coastlines, in fragile marine ecosystems, in heritage sites like the Great Barrier Reef.

If you leave this conference with one message from Australia, I want it to be this: the Australian Government understands the urgency of the challenge facing our planet, and we are committed to being a full partner in the global fight to solve it.

Australia's new parliament will sit for the first time next month.

One of the Government's first acts will be to legislate a more ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target, of 43% below 2005 levels, with a clear path to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

There is no such thing as a healthy ocean without a healthy climate.

Ambition is our only option.

As Minister, my mission is to preserve Australia's unique environment for future generations.

That is why our government has committed almost \$1.2 billion to preserving and restoring the Great Barrier Reef over the next decade.

This money will go to schemes like the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program, which funds cutting edge research on coral restoration and reef cooling.

Research that can be shared with other countries experiencing the same problems.

The Great Barrier Reef stretches along our border to the Pacific.

The new Australian Government is determined to always face out in the same direction – building a deep, mutually respectful partnership with our friends in the region.

I want to make this promise to everyone from the Pacific here today: Australia is listening closely to what you're saying – and we are ready to act.

Not just on climate, but on every environmental question that touches you.

I want to see a plastics free Pacific in our lifetime.

Australia is taking unprecedented steps to manage plastics pollution at home, with world leading export bans and investments in recycling infrastructure.

But we're also partnering with you directly – by helping Pacific nations find alternatives to single use plastics.

We can only solve these problems by working together; by combining our knowledge and experience.

In Australia, we have 65,000 years of successful environmental conservation to draw on.

The new Australian Government is committed to lifting up Indigenous voices, by implementing the historic Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We are committed to bringing Indigenous knowledge into every corner of government.

First Nations are establishing sea country agreements for our marine parks and our ocean Indigenous Protected Areas; just like First Nations Australians are managing our land with the Indigenous Rangers program.

This knowledge is a gift; and our government will accept it for the generous offering that it is.

So thank you for having me at this conference.

For a new Minister, these conversations have been priceless.

Know that you will always have an upfront, constructive, enthusiastic partner in our government.

The challenges facing us might be great; but so is our determination to meet them.

Thank you.