



Government of the Cook Islands

Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki - Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration

## UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE 2022

27 June – 1 July 2022

Lisbon, Portugal

### ***“Cook Islands Plenary Statement at the United Nations Ocean Conference 2022”***

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be here in Lisbon on behalf of the Cook Islands, and to deliver a warm Kia Orana to you all.

“Kia rauka te oraanga tiratiratu tei umuumuia e te iti tangata, tangoia ki runga I ta tatou peu Maori e te aotini taporoporoia o te Basileia”

This quote from our National Cultural Policy means ‘to enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people and in harmony with our culture and environment.’

Our Culture and our Environment are the foundations of Pacific livelihoods and the measure of our success. Over 99% of our physical geography is ocean!

At the UN Ocean Conference in 2017, the Cook Islands proudly announced plans to dedicate our nearly 2 million square km Exclusive Economic Zone to protection, conservation, and integrated management: our marine park, Marae Moana. We did this for Our Ocean, we did this for Our Future.

In taking stock of what has been achieved since the establishment of Marae Moana, we are proud to share our progress.

The Marae Moana Act was passed in 2017 with the primary purpose to protect and conserve the ecological, biodiversity, and heritage values of the Cook Islands marine environment. The Act establishes marine protected areas of 50 nautical miles around each of our 15 islands, where all commercial extractive activities are restricted. These closed zones equate to an area of over 320,000 square km—roughly three times the area of our host country, Portugal.

Our Marae Moana philosophy underpins all action we have subsequently taken to contribute to the implementation of Goal 14, and guides many of our national and international priorities.

We are excited for large upcoming projects within Marae Moana, including on seafloor mapping, ocean monitoring, strengthening the blue economy, traditional and small scale conservation practices, marine biodiversity and addressing pollution.

As a country that does not produce any plastic, the Cook Islands remains extremely concerned about the environmental, social, cultural, and health impacts of plastic pollution in our islands.

We have therefore joined our Pacific neighbours in endorsing the “*Pacific Regional Declaration on the Prevention of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution and its Impacts*”.

We have also supported initiatives to address plastic pollution in other international fora, including at the International Maritime Organisation.

There was therefore no hesitation when it came to supporting the UNEA resolution to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee for an international binding treaty to address plastic pollution, and we call for concerted international effort in this process.

The complex and interconnected nature of the ocean and of the pressures placed on the ocean, require international cooperation to determine and implement solutions to ensure a healthy ocean.

Partnerships have been an integral part of our success thus far. As a Large Ocean State, driving its own sustainable development, we encourage new and existing partnerships to support our ocean action to be scaled up effectively.

The Cook Islands is committed to building, improving and enhancing our scientific knowledge, and we see this as the key to making responsible evidence-based decisions. We are encouraged by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and to this end we invite expressions of interest from external partners to work with us to support marine scientific research in our Marae Moana.

As highlighted by several others, SDG14 is the least financed of all the sustainable development goals. Everyone here this week has referenced the importance of the Ocean to the lives and livelihoods of all peoples, and so we call for financial institutions to adapt to the capacity of SIDS.

The traditional development assistance framework does not work for everyone. It is based on the premise that countries reduce vulnerability as wealth grows. This is not the case for SIDS and we welcome the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General and the high level panel of

experts on finalizing and implementing a unique multidimensional Vulnerability Index.

Furthermore, the architecture of many global and regional financial support mechanisms is mismatched to the capacity and needs of small island states. We need to differentiate approaches, be more efficient, and make more impact by acting with urgency and appropriate scale, over extended time frames to ensure successful outcomes.

The Cook Islands reaffirms our commitment to support the implementation of Goal 14 to ensure the health of our Marae Moana for generations to come.

We call for renewed and strengthened commitments by all at this conference

Kia Manuia.