

Panellist Statement

Pacific Ocean Commissioner

Ocean Action Panel 8 - Promoting and supporting all forms of cooperation,
especially at the regional and subregional level

Chair, panellists, distinguished delegates and fellow guardians of our Ocean—thank you for inviting me to contribute to this important panel on a topic very dear to me.

I am from the Pacific where my people are custodians of nearly 20% of the Earth's surface.

The ocean is part of us. It is our common heritage, our lifeline, and the future for our children, and in my case, our grandchildren.

While we have been referred to as Small Island Developing States but our very own Pacific scholar Epeli Hau'ofa reminds us that- ***smallness is but a state of mind***. We are big Ocean States that have the right to demand of the global north for more sustainable ocean action, transparency and accountability in the delivery of commitments under multilateral frameworks.

The Blue Pacific is vast. For generations our people have known the expanse of our home. We have navigated thousands and thousands of miles across this expanse, to trade, to marry, to discover the expanse of our Blue Pacific. **We are the ocean.**

When we talk about regional cooperation, **this is not something new to the Pacific**. Our Pacific regionalism has deep historical roots that predate modern institutions. And, as our modern world has evolved, so too has our conception of ocean governance to address our global challenges.

We have in place a deep and ever evolving regional architecture. Not only do we have a Regional Seas Programme and Conventions through our **Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme**, but we also have in place our scientific and technical agency, the **Pacific Community**, who drive ocean science and data for our region. **The Forum Fisheries Agency** supports collective action for sustainable use of offshore fisheries. Our regional **University of the South Pacific** teach our future ocean leaders. Sitting at the apex of this regional architecture is the **Pacific Islands Forum**, who bring our the region together at the highest political levels to drive action under our region's blue print– **the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**.

My role of Pacific Ocean Commissioner was created to bring the necessary high-level representation and dedicated advocacy and attention to Pacific Ocean priorities, decisions and processes at national, regional and international levels. My role is also to facilitate the Pacific Ocean Alliance, a multistakeholder network developed to support regional ocean policy coordination and implementation.

This role was to fill a gap in our regional ocean governance – one focused on **effective coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders and ocean sectors**.

When we talk about cooperation we must remember that the ocean is one system and does not know the boundaries we humans create. Barnacles cooperate with whales, algae cooperates with coral. Therefore, we must mimic the ocean and cooperate and coordinate across institutions, across sectors, across borders, across cultures.

It is not easy. Getting different ocean sectors and stakeholders in the same room and speaking the same language is not often simple. But in the Pacific, our Ocean work is being driven by our **Pacific Way** and our **shared interest and custodianship of our immense Blue real estate**. And by the legacy we must leave to our children and grandchildren.

What does this look like in the Pacific? In the lead up to UNOC 3, our region held a technical meeting of ocean stakeholders, followed by a Pacific Ocean Ministerial Meeting. These preparatory meetings enabled us to draw links between climate, biodiversity, high seas, fisheries, and pollution. We prepared to ensure we came to UNOC with strength, as one collective Blue Pacific voice. I am immensely proud of how the Pacific has worked together to tirelessly advocate for our people of the Blue Pacific, and we have seen that first hand in Nice in the last three days. I believe this level of cooperation and coordination at all levels and across sectors can be a model for others.

In 2023, my office was mandated by our Leaders to coordinate with partners, including regional organizations, to support our Member countries in their efforts to ratify, implement, and/or domesticate the BBNJ Agreement. OPOC's coordination of its partners is crucial to ensure that effective support and maximum impact is delivered to Members. This joint effort and collaboration have contributed to achieving the BBNJ Agreement's objective on cooperation and coherence in the region.

Beyond these examples, the Pacific cooperates **to effectively and responsibly managing 100% of our Blue Pacific**. We lead in the creation of vast marine protected areas, sustainably managing transboundary tuna, and in evolving our system of fit for purpose governance for our sea of islands.

While I believe in the power of cooperation, we must not forget that the **challenges in the Pacific are immense**. The seas are rising, our tuna are shifting, and our coral is bleaching, rules-based international order is being challenged. Immediate action on climate change underpins our survival. We cannot do this work alone but need the partnerships to innovate and to help the region transform Ocean Governance and to take this to the second level.

Aside from the immediate need for technology and climate resilient infrastructure, there are huge opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and capacities within our existing regional and national institutions. Scientific capacities, institutional capacities, technical capacities acknowledge our indigenous knowledge and the Pacific Way. Doing so recognises that our people are truly our greatest assets to drive sustainable development.

The Pacific comes to UNOC with agreed upon regional voluntary commitments to drive finance for our ocean: Pacific led initiatives like:

- Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity and
- the Pacific Resilience Facility.

These are designed to mobilize new, large scale investment to the region. They are designed **to align finance to meet our specific needs and to deliver our 2050**

Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and are motivated largely by the challenges confronting the region's ability to access global funds.

We have heard many commitments this week. I urge stakeholders to recognise the Pacific custodianship of our huge ocean. Help us make Pacific solutions global solutions. And help support us to overcome our unique vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing finance for our goals.

Align your support to **our national and regional priorities and institutions to deliver on our ambitions for the Blue Pacific Continent.**

I end by reiterating the call that **we must all act as ocean custodians. We must act collaboratively, and for the sake of our ocean, we must support our Blue Pacific Continent – for, we are the Ocean.**