



**Statement by the Prime Minister Hon Fiame Naomi Mataaafa at
UNOC3, Plenary Nice FRANCE
10 June**

Excellencies,

I bring a missive of hope but also one of disquiet.

We exist in a world of growing conflict, want, and crisis. Too many of us are facing an uncertain future, unsure of how we will do good on today's needs, tomorrow's investment, and our survival. International trade is on the edge. The attack on multilateralism is of particular concern. From where we stand, the few systems that provide us with protection are being dismantled and those that promote inequality and dependency are being protected.

Besides climate change, our ocean is facing a global emergency. Its health is under enormous strain – from pollution in its many forms, sea-level rise, ocean warming and acidification, biodiversity loss and the over-exploitation of fish stock. The ocean crisis is multi-dimensional and interconnected in nature, requiring a global response.

Making that vision work will require systematic and evidence-based processes that create shared and common actions, align existing efforts, and identifying and filling the gaps.

As large ocean states, people of the Blue Pacific have enjoyed the bounty of the sea for generations. From the vibrant coral reefs in our ocean to the lush greenery on our shores, our islands hold a treasure trove of life that is both awe-inspiring and crucial for our planet's ecological balance.

Unlike many of our other struggles in addressing our most urgent priorities, the ocean crisis has much to do with our choices as it does with who we are.

Our growing populations and economies have shifted our mindsets. We believe that more disposable income somehow equates to a better world. And here the caution by the Secretary-General Guterres is most apt, and I quote: “ it is absurd that our measure of a country’s wealth rises when there is overfishing, cutting down of forests or burning of fossil fuels. When we destroy nature, count it as an increase in wealth”; unquote.

Couple this with the exploitation of our ocean’s mineral resources through deep seabed mining, and the result is a crisis of limitless proportions. These planetary changes leave no middle ground. Our oceans are being exploited unsustainably while the rising temperatures are killing existing marine life.

These underscore the urgent need for stronger governance frameworks and astute political leadership. Without the credible action of the international community, large ocean states face a future with no land and usable ocean.

The conversations to be shared under the 10 Ocean Action Panels during our Conference will be pivotal in providing additional insights on the way forward. We are encouraged that most of the topics embraced by the action panels are also detailed in our Samoa Ocean Strategy as well as the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent and the Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration

The Commonwealth Leaders gathered in Samoa last year, and issued its first Ocean Declaration; the Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration. This significant signal from the Commonwealth family reaffirms its commitment to the global ocean goal. More importantly, it provides a clear response and call to action from Commonwealth Leaders on many of the key ocean issues, among them strong solidarity with the Blue Pacific and SIDS to safeguard the permanency of our coastlines and our homes against the unprecedented impacts of sea level rise.

At the national level, our Samoa Ocean Strategy, reaffirms our commitment to protect 30% and manage 100% of our ocean by 2030 because we know we must sustain that which sustains us now and into the future.

On ocean governance Samoa believes that a stable and fit for purpose governance framework is essential for the responsible and sustainable management of ocean space and resources. Within the Blue Pacific, similar conviction has lent to the ongoing review of its regional architecture to ensure it is well aligned to the ambition of its 2050 Strategy. Effective and sustainable governance of the high seas is essential to achieving a balance between the growth and development of the ocean economy and maintaining the health and productivity of the global interconnected ocean. Perhaps an Ocean Governance Authority could be the way forward.

Samoa also calls for the urgent ratification and timely implementation of the BBNJ Agreement as a matter of priority. While we have not been able to meet the deadline for ratification prior to UNOC3, we are committed to this goal in the very near future.

Samoa proudly announces the legal adoption of its Marine Spatial Plan, becoming one of the first Pacific nations to protect 30% and sustainably manage 100% of its ocean. The Plan establishes nine new fully protected Marine Protected Areas and integrates traditional community-managed areas, reflecting both science and cultural heritage. The MSP was developed through extensive national consultation with local stakeholders and in partnership with international partners.

Rising sea levels are devouring our homes. Coastal erosion, increased saltwater intrusion, and the submersion of low-lying areas are threatening the very existence of our people. Equity demands that the duty of cooperation should assist the states that are worst affected by sea-level rise, including providing support to displaced communities and individuals.

Plastic pollution is of serious concern to countries like Samoa, who are disproportionately affected. We welcome global consensus for a legally binding Treaty on plastic pollution including in the marine environment. Whilst earliest consensus is preferred, we must ensure that such a treaty does not create more problems and confusion than it is intended to solve.

The lack of investment in the ocean is self-evident and a huge challenge. Of all the SDGs, SDG14 is by far the least funded, attracting only 0.01 % of all SDGs financial support. Clearly, there is much work to be done at the global level involving governments, international financial institutions and the private sector. Ensuring the commitments and pledges made during UNOC1 and UNOC2 are honoured and available, will move us in the right direction.

The truth is without integrated considerations and collective undertaking, vulnerable countries, especially SIDS, will not know resilient development.

Our oceans must be viable. Samoa can do its part but much of our challenge lies with the users and extractors far beyond our shores. It is not too late to protect what we have with determination and tenacity.

In conclusion, we need a clean, healthy and resilient ocean; a productive ocean supporting our food supply and economies; a safe ocean where life and livelihoods are protected; an ocean with access to finance, data, information and technology, and innovation; an inspiring and engaging ocean where society understands and values it in relation to human wellbeing and sustainable development.

It takes an overarching methodology that links sufficiency, fairness, and sustainability, with people and our planet at the centre

Thank you