



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
HON MARK BROWN
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

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Address by Honourable Prime Minister Mark Brown

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Your Holiness, Heads of State, Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

First, let me thank Prime Minister Mitsotakis and the government and people of Greece for their warm hospitality, Kia Orana and greetings to you all.

My people are proud voyagers and a thousand years ago they built boats that could sail into the wind, that could navigate using the stars. And with courage and purpose, they discovered the islands that we inhabit today.

Our Moana Nui O Kiva, our Marae Moana is our lifeblood and inseparable from our Pacific peoples, cultures, economies and societies. We have always lived in harmony with our ocean. And for us, that harmony is non-negotiable.

My country, the Cook Islands, is nearly two million kilometres of ocean, an ocean area that is nearly the size of the whole Mediterranean Sea, but with a total land area of only one tenth that of Athens.

As custodians of nearly 20% of our Earth's surface, our region, the Pacific, is committed to combating the ongoing threats of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Leaders of the Pacific have endorsed the 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific continent. Our regional road map that builds on our collective vision, amplifying our voices in solidarity to support the delivery of action orientated solutions.



As we look towards a positive future together, our region encourages and welcomes stronger partnerships and engagements beyond the Blue Pacific continent. The challenges that we face as a global community in addressing the decline of the state of the ocean system is a shared responsibility that must be tackled collectively. Today we find ourselves at an important juncture in the ocean governance landscape.

For the blue continent, our national and regional efforts are based on a considered and collective appreciation of our roles and responsibilities to address these global challenges, whilst also recognising a deep respect for our independent sovereignty. However, it is very difficult to effectively manage what you cannot measure, the expense and centrality of our Pacific Ocean to global planetary stability is well appreciated.

However, it remains one of the least funded parts on Earth by way of investment into science, research and documentation of traditional knowledge. It is crucial that Pacific countries such as ours are involved in the Co design of scientific research. The Co production of knowledge and the Co delivery of solutions in support of decision making, policy and management to guide future research in our region and beyond.

It is imperative that we adopt a precautionary approach, ensuring that our decisions are informed by factual evidence and sound scientific research by embracing peer reviewed science and avoiding the influence of ideological biases, we can ensure that our actions are guided. By good practice and results that align with the principles of sustainability and conservation. Only through a commitment to evidence-based decision making can we

hope to safeguard the health and integrity of the marine environment for future generations.



I am delighted to share with you that, last year the Pacific leaders agreed to a regional collective action to establish a Pacific Center of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science or as we call it, the PCEDOS. PCEDOS underscores our Pacific collaborative spirit and commitment to advancing ocean science and stewardship and will be one of the main vehicles that can enhance science and ocean governance within our region and beyond.

I take this opportunity to highlight the Cook Islands holistic approach to our ocean governance. Our Marae Moana, which covers 100% of our 2,000,000 square kilometer EEZ and was formally entrenched into our laws in 2017. We have set out our marine protected areas and management zones. For the BBNJ we have signed the agreement. And are now progressing efforts to enable ratification.

On sustainable fisheries, our region will continue to implement world leading regional controls and standards to manage and regulate our fisheries and achieve sustainable stock levels of the four key tuna species in the Western and Central Pacific and ensure our zone-based management is underpinned by scientific data collection and analysis, particularly to tackle the impacts of climate change.

On seabed minerals, we have taken a precautionary approach towards the sustainable development of our sector, in harmony with our high environmental, social and cultural values. Our national efforts have centered around transparent decision making, inclusive processes and environmental stewardship, ensuring that our actions are guided by science and the needs of our people.

To be clear, the Cook Islands only permits exploration activities in our waters. Currently, we do not allow exploitation activities as we do not currently have enough data to make an informed and science-based decision on that. The precautionary approach and our laws are very clear on that.

On plastics, with the legally binding international instrument to end plastic pollution, my government has committed to negotiating an ambitious instrument that is comprehensive across the full life cycle of plastics. This will ensure our oceans are safeguarded from the triple planetary crisis from planet, from plastic pollution.



Let me close by saying that our policies and decisions should be guided by science and knowledge, not by fear. It was not the spirit of fear that allowed us as Pacific people to traverse the vast Pacific and discover and settle the islands we now call home.

Rather, it was the spirit of discovery and courage rooted in the traditional knowledge of our ocean environment and our celestial navigation. So let us all continue to use these principles to navigate our oceans into the future.

I thank you very much.