



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

9th Our Oceans Conference 2024
Waitt Institute and the Office of the
Pacific Ocean Commissioner Side Event:

Remarks by Honourable Prime Minister Mark Brown

Athens, Greece | 15 April 2024

To our Heads of State, Ministers, Excellencies, and distinguished delegates.

A warm Kia Orana to you all.

I am honoured to speak at this event in recognition of the importance of our oceans to the current and future prosperity of our Pacific and the world.

I also acknowledge our host Greece for your welcoming us to your beautiful country – it is great to be here.

I have just come from Barcelona, where I attended the UN Ocean Decade conference which discussed the “science we want for the ocean we need.”

There I had the opportunity to contribute our Pacific voices and perspectives. Although we in the Pacific are custodians of around 20% of the worlds surface, consisting of 42 million square kilometres – we are not custodians of our ocean science and knowledge.

Taking more ownership of our ocean science can empower us to better protect and manage crucial ecosystems. We must continue to act with urgency and build upon our efforts.



I believe this is where the recent decisions by Pacific Island Forum Leaders under our 2050 Strategy, is visionary in shaping the future trajectory of our scientific endeavours, and oceans more generally.

For example, last year Pacific Leaders agreed to a Regional Collective Action to establish a “Pacific Centre of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science,” or as we call it 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 within our region and beyond.

Turning to the Cook Islands – Over a decade ago, we embarked on a journey to create an Oceans Governance framework that would provide long-term, intergenerational benefit and security for our people and by extension, our Pacific.

This framework drew upon the oceans management practices and wisdom of our ancestors, and the best available science, allowing us to strike a harmonious balance between our economic interests and conservation ambitions. As I have said, it is science that empowers us and science that must continue to inform our oceans management approaches into the future.

I refer here of course to our Cook Islands multi-use marine park, our Marae Moana, which covers 100% of our 2 million square kilometre Exclusive Economic Zone and was formally entrenched in our laws in 2017 setting out marine protected areas and management zones.



Turning to other Oceans issues:

My government recently signed the BBNJ agreement. We are now in the process of planning the blocks required to ratify the BBNJ agreement.

On sustainable fisheries – The Cook Islands successfully hosted the WCPFC last year to reinforce our shared responsibility for managing our shared tuna stocks through sustainable fisheries.

The Cook Islands, along with coastal State SIDS and regional partners, 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 Ocean, 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.

We have spent the last decade preparing our laws, strengthening our regulatory bodies, expanding our knowledge base, and most importantly bringing our people along on our journey.

Our national efforts have centred 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 clear on that.



On Plastics – As plastic production is expected to more than double by 2050, the 8 to 12 million tons of plastic waste that leaks into our marine environment is concerning.

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 lifecycle

of plastics. This will ensure our oceans are safeguarded from the triple planetary crisis from plastic pollution.



For the blue continent, our national and regional efforts are based on a collective appreciation of our roles and responsibilities to address these global challenges, whilst recognizing a deep respect for our independent sovereignty.

And with those remarks, esteemed colleagues, we look to our fellow leaders and key partners present here this week to join us in this journey to ensure that we prosper together for the protection and management of our oceans.

Kia Manuia