



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

78th UNGA High-Level Side Event
Launch of a Global Call to Action for Accelerating Sustainable Development
through Deep-Sea Research, Technology Development and Innovations

Keynote address by the Honourable Prime Minister Mark Brown

19 September 2023, 1:15-2:30 pm,
United Nations Headquarters, New York



Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, His Excellency Michael Lodge

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Kia Orana and warm pacific greetings to you all

Our ocean is our lifeblood. As a nation that is 99.99% ocean it is inevitable that we turn to our ocean for our protection and our sustenance. It provides us with food and income and is part of our identity. Its resources hold immense potential for our growth and prosperity. As stewards of our ocean, we proceed with caution to enable both the conservation and the sustainable use of our marine resources.

Knowledge serves as the cornerstone of wisdom and is a key enabler of our sustainable development.

We come from a voyaging people. Centuries ago our Pacific ancestors used traditional knowledge to navigate by the stars to sail across the great Pacific and discover new islands in our vast ocean.

Today, our increased scientific knowledge of our ocean and the deep sea will help us fulfil the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable management of our global commons.



The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, provides us with a precautionary legal regime for the stewardship of our oceans, grounded in the best available science.

Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm the Cook Islands commitment to UNCLOS as the global authority for the stewardship of the global commons.

We also remain steadfast in our support of the International Seabed Authority's efforts, as the competent expert organisation tasked with regulating activities, protecting the marine environment, and promoting marine scientific research in the international seabed Area for the benefit of all.



I wholeheartedly support the Global Call for Action and the four main priorities it advances, and would like to share the Cook Islands efforts towards this at the national, regional and global levels:

At the national level, the Cook Islands is blessed with an abundance of natural ocean resources, which includes deep seabed minerals. We have spent the last two decades responsibly and sustainably developing our deep seabed minerals sector, in line with the precautionary approach.

Through our deep-sea exploration programme, we are building a significant body of information and research as we strive to complement commercially motivated research with more marine scientific research, not least from our own government scientists. The research priorities set out in the MSR Action Plan provides the Cook Islands with a useful guide to align our national deep sea research agenda.

We have begun to increase our knowledge and understanding of our deep-sea biodiversity and the measures necessary to ensure proper conservation and management. These advances have gone hand in hand with the development of marine technology and innovation.

Our growing knowledge base is leading to more complete and relevant discussions on seabed minerals related issues. We have seen new collaborations forming amongst our scientists, working with their peers from around the world in many scientific fields to try and find the truth about what we have in the deep sea.

We have defined our entire exclusive economic zone as a multi-use marine protected area, called Marae Moana, our sacred ocean. This ensures the integration of our management efforts and brings together our various stakeholders. As ocean stewards, we have enshrined the precautionary approach in our legislation and we have continued to evolve our systems to promote public access to environmental data and critical associated interpretation of that data.

In our efforts to bring our people along on the journey, we are working on deep sea literacy, growing not only our outreach with our communities, but also training our young scientists and officers to also use the scientific method and share their learnings with our people. In this we thank the ISA for their deep-sea literacy programmes in setting the standards on which we can base our own development.

The new discoveries we are making in our deep sea is like turning on a light in a dark room, building our collective knowledge and understanding. This is why scientific research is critical. It sets the foundation for the future work that we need, to manage it well.

This wealth of newfound knowledge will help guide us in the important decisions we will need to make in the future about our seabed minerals sector and its role in the supply of critical metals for the green transition. The energy shift away from fossil fuels towards critical metals.



At the regional level, the Pacific has long been a champion of SDG14 and the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans. As the custodians of nearly 20 percent of the earth's surface, we are acutely aware of the pressing challenges we face in protecting and managing our Blue Pacific Continent.

To that end, we have developed our 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent which sets out the roadmap for Pacific Action. Our 2050 Strategy is a collective vision that is deeply rooted in the Pacific context, amplifying our united voices in solidarity to support delivery of action-orientated solutions, particularly in the context of accelerated climate action.

Connected to our 2050 Strategy, I am pleased to share that we are in the process of establishing the Pacific Centre for Excellence on Deep Ocean Science, which will be based at the University of the South Pacific Campus of the Cook Islands.

The Pacific Centre of Excellence will provide a regional platform for both research and teaching, leveraging off the current boom in exploration, but aiming to provide independent expertise for all our stakeholders. This presents a timely opportunity for us to ensure that this regional effort aligns with the global agenda for deep sea science.



At the global level, we all recognise the importance of our collective efforts and the need to continue to develop partnerships based on mutual respect, amongst all relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and industry. The Cook Islands appreciates and values all its international partners and looks forward to more collaboration.

As we increase our overall knowledge base, it is more important than ever that we stick to the scientific method to support our decisions as custodians of our oceans. To be effective, the scientific method needs to be based on solid interpretations, clearly articulated assumptions and most importantly fact-based evidence. Thus, all good science is good science, all facts are facts, and we need to work together to solve some of these very important challenges that we face in achieving our sustainable development goals.

In closing, the Cook Islands will do our part to encourage all stakeholders to join in the efforts to support this Global Call For Action that will help advance our marine scientific knowledge of our oceans, and which will ultimately lead to a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all.

Kia manuia and God bless