



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

High-Level Panel
Charting a course for responsible and sustainable management
responsible of seabed minerals of the Blue Pacific Continent

Nuku'alofa, 20 June 2023



The Honourable Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, the Honourable Siasia Sovaleni, the Honourable Ministers, the Secretary General of the International Seabed Authority, His Excellency Michael Lodge, Distinguished delegates, Ladies, and gentlemen,

Kia Orana and warm Pacific greetings to you all.

First and foremost, allow me to acknowledge the Government and people of the Kingdom of Tonga for the arrangements and facilitation of this auspicious occasion.

It is with great pleasure that I address this High-Level Panel as the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum and Prime Minister of the Cook Islands.



The Pacific Ocean is inseparable from Pacific peoples, cultures, economies, and societies.

Our Moana Nui O Kiva, our Blue Pacific Continent, is our lifeblood. It provides us with food, with income and prosperity. It is part of our identity. We have always lived in harmony with our ocean and for us that harmony is non-negotiable.

We consider ourselves proud stewards of our ocean, ensuring that we proceed with caution to enable both the conservation and the sustainable use of our marine resources.

Within our Blue Pacific Continent, deep seabed minerals hold immense potential for our growth and prosperity. It is our duty to ensure that this potential is developed responsibly, for the long-term well-being of our people and the preservation of our unique marine environment.

As Pacific peoples, we are acutely aware of the pressing challenges we face in protecting and managing our Blue Pacific Continent. As the custodians of nearly 20 percent of the earth's surface, we are committed to combatting the ongoing threats of climate change, loss of biodiversity, waste, and pollution.

To that end, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent sets out our roadmap for Pacific collective action and regionalism.



Key to the sustainable development of our seabed minerals is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides us with a precautionary legal regime for the stewardship of our oceans, grounded in the best available science.

I take this opportunity today to reaffirm the Cook Islands commitment to UNCLOS as the global regime for the stewardship of the global commons.

As a State party to UNCLOS, and more particularly as a Pacific Small Islands Developing State, we place a very high value on the principles and rights enshrined in UNCLOS. Rights that were hard fought and the result of decades of negotiations and compromise.

These rights extend to the common heritage of humankind, these rights extend to all voices working together, all equal.

We also remain steadfast in our support of the International Seabed Authority's efforts. As the organisation tasked with regulating activities in the Area, protecting the marine environment, and promoting marine scientific research for the benefit of all – the Authority plays a critical ocean governance role.

Through UNCLOS, we are collectively putting in place the regulatory frameworks and processes needed to ensure the sustainable and responsible development of seabed minerals for the benefit of all humanity.

All of this, before any exploitation has been approved.

Today, we are at a crucial juncture as the Authority continues to progress the development of the rules for the exploitation of minerals in the Area. This has garnered increased interest and scrutiny in the activities of the Area.

Now more than ever, we must reinforce the integrity of and respect for the rights enshrined within UNCLOS and ensure that the institutions created for its implementation are supported.



At the national level, we in the Cook Islands have taken a precautionary approach towards the development of our seabed minerals sector, in harmony with our high environmental, social, and cultural values.

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

Today we are a Sponsoring State of an exploration contract in the Area, and we have issued three exploration licenses within our national waters.

Our 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.

Currently, we are on a journey of discovery and understanding of our deep ocean – our exploration programme holds the key to unlocking our oceans resources responsibly and sustainably.

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 our role in the supply of critical metals.

These decisions will take account of the potential impact on the environment, the benefits for the people of the Cook Islands, and the important contribution our minerals can make to enable the global green transition towards a low carbon society to help combat climate change.



Reflecting upon our global, regional, and national efforts – it is clear to me that we are well on our way to charting a course for responsible and sustainable management of seabed minerals.

With those remarks, let us strengthen our collective resolve and commitment towards our Blue Pacific Continent, that balances economic progress with environmental stewardship, leaving a legacy of resilience and prosperity for generations to come.

Kia Orana and Kia Manuia.