



Address by Alex Herman, Commissioner of the Seabed Minerals Authority at the Fostering international and regional cooperation in support of the sustainable development of the blue economy of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Kia Orana and warm pacific greetings to you all from the Cook Islands on behalf our Prime Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown.

In the Cook Islands, our ocean makes up 99.99% of our country. We truly are an Ocean state.

As people of the ocean – we care for our Marae Moana. We take our Mana Tiaki responsibilities and role as Ocean Stewards very seriously, and I know our Pacific brothers and sisters and other small island developing states also share these sentiments.



The Cook Islands, like many SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs have limited capacity for science, technology and innovation. This is due to a combination of factors, including our small population base and lack of resourcing and human capacity.

These limitations affect our marine scientific research capabilities, and our ability to realise the full potential of our blue economy, as, in order to sustainably manage our natural resources we must have the data, knowledge and understanding to be able to make fully informed, evidence-based decisions.

To put this into a Pacific context, we acknowledge that an enormous amount of data has been collected in the region through marine scientific research and resources assessment cruises. These have contributed to a better understanding of deep sea environment. Nonetheless there remains more data to be collected to ensure that Pacific countries like the Cook Islands can make informed and science based decisions, and develop acceptable environmental management and monitoring plans.



Fully realising our blue economy aspirations requires cooperation like we have never seen before.

It requires collective action and cooperation at multiple levels – national, regional and international.

It requires involving all our stakeholders – governments, international and regional organisations, academic institutions, civil society, industry and our public.



It requires an integrated whole of society approach. Because ocean governance is a whole of society issue.

We saw the recognition of this through SDG 14 – and over the years we are seeing a shift from business as usual towards improved regional and international cooperation.

I point once again to the Pacific as an example. Our Pacific leaders have long held a commitment to working together to protect our Pacific ocean in a manner that resonates with our unique vulnerabilities, our cultures and traditions, our social, economic and environmental landscape.

Our 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent will articulate our Pacific Way and Pacific led solutions for the prosperity of our people and economies, long into the future.



We have set the example through our regional cooperation and management of fisheries in the Western Pacific Ocean – and we have an opportunity to continue to set this example in our management of seabed minerals.

Regional agencies such as SPC and SPREP help to ensure Pacific-owned solutions to the challenges. At the international level, the International Seabed Authority is the critical actor that brings us all together. There are of course many more actors involved in this space.

I take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth supported by the Authority, UN DESA, and Norway. It is through capacity building initiatives such as this that has helped the Cook Islands increase and solidify our understanding and knowledge in the field of the deep seabed marine environment and marine scientific research.



In the Cook Islands, we are responsibly exploring the potential of our seabed minerals interests as we seek to diversify our economy away from an almost exclusive dependence on tourism. We have been proactive in cooperating and building partnerships with national, regional and international partners alike,

including to name just a few the Authority, SPC, NIWA, Geoscience Australia, CSIRO, and the Natural History Museum.

We recently completed a 16-month long robust and transparent exploration licensing process in our national waters, whereby we issued 3 exploration licences to companies who understand and accept our Cook Islands values and aspirations for our Marae Moana. Over the next 5 years, nearly \$200 million will be spent on exploration work plans in these licensed areas – work which will dramatically improve our knowledge and understanding of our deep ocean. This is significant for a country like the Cook Islands – who has wanted to see marine scientific research occurring for decades, but never had the means to do so ourselves.

I wish to reiterate that the Cook Islands has made it clear we are only allowing exploration activities, and the onus remains on the licence holders to demonstrate to us that they can collect our nodules without causing serious harm to the marine environment.

We are also actively exploring other avenues to enable marine scientific research expeditions in the rest of our EEZ – particularly through the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

These steps we are taking today will help build our marine scientific knowledge, capacity and capability towards a prosperous future for our people and country.



In closing, our Blue Economy has the potential to transform our people and country's development, along with other SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs.

We seek to balance our conservation and preservation imperatives against our development aspirations, and at all times putting the needs of our people and environment first.

In order to realise these aspirations we must take our stewardship, our mana tiaki responsibilities seriously, and we must act in an inclusive and holistic way. For the Cook Islands, we will continue to do our part in supporting the good work of the Authority, and to be proactive in fostering national, regional and international cooperation for the better of humankind.