

28th International Seabed Authority Assembly, Agenda Item 8

Joint Statement delivered by Alex Herman (Cook Islands) on behalf of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, and the Kingdom of Tonga and Vanuatu.

26 July 2023

Mr. President,

Thank you for giving my Delegation the floor. I am honoured to deliver this Statement on behalf of Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

Our connection to the ocean is deeply rooted in our identity, our traditions, our practices, and our culture. It has and continues to be a source of sustenance to past and present generations, and it will be for our future generations to come.

Last year, our leaders endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent - our vision for collective action developed by our peoples, for our peoples. Our Pacific delegations who participate in the work of the Authority aim to implement the 2050 Strategy by, among other things, being engaged in the process of Pacific regionalism in appropriate fora as advanced through the 2050 Strategy, including with respect to the marine environment, its biological diversity, and its resources.

As ocean custodians, we recognise the nature of the Ocean as one body of water flowing beyond the confines of our set boundaries, within and beyond the Blue Pacific Continent.

As such, we must ensure our combined and distinct voices are heard in the conservation and sustainable use of the international seabed Area.

Whilst we may have differing positions, we are all united in our commitment to ensure the protection of the ocean and the marine environment. As such, we remain open to further deliberations in the spirit of Talanoa.

We stress the need for robust, environmentally sound Rules, Regulations and Procedures. Strong environmental protections are necessary if we are to fulfil our obligations in UNCLOS to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment.

We also wish to highlight the importance of marine scientific research for the effective management of the Area and its resources, with special consideration to Pacific Small Island Developing States, through developing programmes for the benefit of developing States and technology with a view to strengthening their research capabilities.

We encourage member States and all stakeholders to support efforts to increase investment in science and technology needed to inform the development of a robust and fit for purpose Mining Code and the effective protection of the marine environment.

Mr President,

We reaffirm our collective commitment towards a strong and comprehensive and fit for purpose regulatory framework to be put in place, based on best available scientific information and, where available, relevant traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment before any exploitation of seabed minerals can occur, in line with the precautionary principle and precautionary approach.

These are fundamental in ensuring a healthy and resilient Pacific for present and future generations.

Mr. President,

I conclude with the words of the famous Tongan Author, Epli Hau'ofa regarding the Pacific Islands: *"Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us"*.

I thank you Mr. President.