



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

2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference
High-Level Opening Segment
Opening Remarks by the Honourable Prime Minister Mark Brown

Barcelona, Spain | 10 April 2024

Your Serene Highness Prince Albert, President of Cabo Verde, President of Seychelles, Ministers, Director-General, Excellencies, Good morning.

Let me also thank the Government of Spain and the UNESCO's IOC, together with the Region of Catalonia and the City of Barcelona for your warm hospitality.

Kia Orana, Buenos Dias.

My people are proud voyagers. A thousand years ago, they built boats that could sail into the wind, and they could navigate using the stars, and discovered the new islands that today we inhabit.



Our Moana Nui O Kiva, our Marae Moana, is our lifeblood and inseparable from our Pacific peoples, our cultures, our economies, and our societies.

We have always lived in harmony with our ocean and for us that harmony is non-negotiable.

My country, the Cook Islands, is nearly 2 million square kilometres in size. An area that is nearly 4 times the size of Spain, but it is 99.99% ocean.



As the custodians of nearly 20 percent of our earth's surface, our region, the Pacific, is committed to combatting the ongoing threats of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and habitats, waste, and pollution.

The Leaders of the Pacific have endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent – our regional roadmap that builds on our collective vision, amplifying our voices in solidarity to support delivery of action-orientated solutions.

As we look towards a positive future together, our region encourages and welcomes stronger partnerships and engagements beyond the Blue Pacific Continent. The challenges that we face as a global community in addressing the decline of the state of the ocean system is a shared responsibility that must be tackled collectively.

However, it is very difficult to effectively manage what you cannot measure. The expanse and centrality of our Pacific Ocean to global planetary stability is well appreciated, however it remains one of the least funded parts on earth by way of investment into science, research, and documentation of traditional knowledge.

Advocating for extensive and effective Maritime scientific research is paramount in our quest to better understand the ecology of the ocean.

It is imperative that we adopt a precautionary approach, ensuring that our decisions are informed by factual evidence and sound scientific research.

By embracing peer-reviewed science and avoiding the influence of ideological biases, we can ensure that our actions are guided by good practice and results that align with the principles of sustainability and conservation.

Only through a commitment to evidence-based decision-making can we hope to safeguard the health and integrity of the marine environment for future generations.



Today, we find ourselves at an important juncture in the ocean governance landscape. This Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development is, in many ways, the path forward.

As we chart our course forward, the Cook Islands joins others in underscoring the importance of identifying and prioritising future avenues for ocean knowledge and scientific advancement at national, regional, and global levels.

Pacific countries and indeed all small island developing states, such as ours, need to be involved in the co-design of scientific research, the co-production of knowledge and to co-deliver solutions in support of decision-making, policy, and management to guide future research in our region and beyond.

It is my pleasure to share that last year in the Cook Islands, 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 regional commitment to advancing ocean science and stewardship.

PCEDOS is not yet established, but it is envisaged to be a learning hub that is developed to include both teaching and interrelated research components focused on deep ocean science and providing centralised expertise and knowledge exchange to benefit the Blue Pacific Continent and beyond.

By forging relevant key partnerships among universities, scientists, and stakeholders, PCEDOS can contribute significantly to the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

We can help unlock the mysteries of the deep ocean while ensuring its long-term health and resilience.

This is our contribution to this decade-long effort, and we welcome your support.



Let me close by saying that we should be guided by science and knowledge, not fear. It was not the spirit of fear that allowed us as Pacific people to traverse the vast Pacific to discover and settle the islands that we now call home.

Rather, it was the spirit of discovery rooted in the traditional knowledge of our ocean environment and celestial navigation.

Science and discovery must continue to bolster our understanding and meet our commitments to the Ocean Decade.

Kia Manuia, Muchas Gracias