



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

The Pacific Community – Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner Side  
Event at the UN Ocean Decade Conference 2024  
Opening Remarks by Honourable Prime Minister Mark Brown

“Toward a 100% Integrated Blue Pacific Management: leveraging the  
benefits of the UN Ocean Decade for the Pacific Islands.”

Barcelona, Spain | 11 April 2024

Pacific Ocean Commissioner, Leaders, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Kia Orana and Warm Pacific greetings to you all.

This side-event is a timely one for us all. Although we are custodians of around 30% of the world's surface, consisting of around 42 million square kilometres, we are not custodians of our ocean science.

Our reliance on external science has perhaps created some separation from us understanding and managing our own marine environments effectively. Taking more ownership of our ocean science can empower us to better protect and manage these crucial ecosystems.

The Ocean Decade is our global movement to ramp up science, and we are almost halfway already. We must continue to act with urgency and build upon our efforts. I believe this is where the recent decision by Pacific Island Forum Leaders under our 2050 Strategy is very visionary in shaping the future trajectory of our scientific endeavours.

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 commitment to advancing ocean science and stewardship and will be one of the main vehicles that can enhance science within our region and beyond.

At the start of the Ocean Decade in 2021, Pacific Leaders committed to responsibly and effectively manage 100% of the Blue Pacific Ocean within and beyond national jurisdiction to ensure its health, productivity, resilience and safety based on scientific information and traditional knowledge. That yet again is quite visionary by our Pacific Leaders.

To give some context, the High-level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economy is calling for 100% sustainable ocean management within national jurisdiction. The Global Biodiversity Framework calls for 30% protection on land and sea by 2030.

Whereas Pacific leaders’ commitments have been more ambitious seeking 100% effective management, both within and beyond jurisdictions. This is almost in anticipation of instruments such as BBNJ, to help us manage areas beyond jurisdictions collectively as a region.



Turning to the Cook Islands – Over a decade ago, we embarked on a journey to create an Oceans Governance framework that would provide long-term, intergenerational benefit and security for our people and by extension, our Pacific.

This framework drew upon the oceans management practices and wisdom of our ancestors, and the best available science, allowing us to strike a harmonious balance between our economic interests and conservation ambitions. As I’ve said, it is science that empowers us and science that must continue to inform our oceans management approaches into the future.

I refer here of course to our Cook Islands multi-use marine park, our Marae Moana, which covers 100% of our 2 million square kilometre Exclusive Economic Zone, and was formally entrenched in our laws in 2017 setting out marine protected areas and management zones.

Importantly, our Marae Moana brings together all the sectors of our society so that we are taking action collectively. Our government, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, private sector and our people all have an important role to play in our Marae Moana.

We have progressed far in terms of our whole-of-society approach to managing our Marae Moana. We have established robust legal frameworks that align with our high environmental, social and cultural values. We have taken decisive steps for how we as a people intend to live, and what we can offer future generations so that their opportunities know no bounds. This is our vision of providing solutions, now.



Looking ahead – What does the Ocean Decade mean for us as a region?

As I see it, we in the Pacific will continue to work at pace to ensure ocean protection and conservation, so that our Blue Continent can carry on providing resources and environmental services, not only for ourselves but for the world. In doing this, we must be guided by the best available science and mobilise traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The Regional Collective Actions called for by the region through the 2050 Strategy resonate through the development of our Ocean Decade Roadmap for the Pacific, currently under consideration by Members. Once endorsed, the Ocean Decade roadmap will help catalyse Ocean Decade actions to achieve the common priorities of the Pacific region and its members.

To our Pacific Ocean scientists on this panel and beyond, I salute you for your efforts and for contributing our Pacific voices to this Ocean Decade.

Kia Manuia, Muchas Gracias