The 2024 Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Sustainable Maritime connectivity

Nadi, Fiji
22–23 July 2024

CONCLUSIONS

1. The 2024 Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Sustainable Maritime Connectivity was organized by the Transport Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) pursuant to ESCAP Commission Resolution 76/1 with the theme of ‘Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Maritime Connectivity in the Pacific.’ The event was held in Nadi, Fiji and online on 22-23 July 2024 and was organized in cooperation with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) and back-to-back with the 46th Pacific Maritime Transport Alliance Conference 2024.

2. The Dialogue was attended by a total of 106 including online participants from government authorities of 23 ESCAP member States, representatives of international organizations, transport and logistics industry representatives, academia, and invited resource persons. The list of participants is attached in Annex 1. The programme of the Dialogue is attached in Annex 2.

3. The participants were presented with the key findings from the upcoming ESCAP Report on Maritime Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific (2023-2024) and discussed issues related to strengthening sustainable maritime connectivity globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on the Pacific sub-region. Representatives from member States shared their approaches and discussed cooperation and support measures on major maritime issues faced by their countries, such as enhancing maritime connectivity, decarbonizing the shipping sector, applying smart port technologies, and ensuring resilience to disasters and climate change.

4. Recognizing the crucial role of robust and stable maritime connectivity for the sustainable and inclusive development of the region, the Dialogue highlighted the following actions for enhancing maritime connectivity:
   - Establishing mid- to long-term national maritime transport policies considering international decarbonization trends, digital technology development, and climate change.
• Enhancing regional cooperation to strengthen technical collaboration and capacity building among Asia-Pacific countries to improve maritime connectivity and support developing countries, especially SIDS and LLDCs.

• Promoting participation and communication with various stakeholders, such as shipping companies, port operators, and local communities.

• Promoting the development of appropriate port infrastructure in cooperation with the private sector, including Public-Private Partnerships, to achieve access to sustainable and modern energy and smart port transitions.

• Promoting sustainable connectivity through enhancing energy efficiency measures in the freight transport sector.

• Expanding research, capacity building, and training projects in cooperation with international and regional agencies to strengthen sustainable maritime connectivity and port development, based on awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing member States.

5. With its focus on the Pacific sub-region, the 2024 Regional Dialogue reaffirmed the specific challenges faced by the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Asia and the Pacific and acknowledged valuable regional initiatives, such as the outcomes of the Pacific Regional Energy and Transport Ministers Meeting, the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership, 6PAC+, and the Micronesian Center for Sustainable Transport (MCST).

6. In the discussions on the challenges in the Pacific, emphasis was placed on climate change adaptation and resilience, regulatory frameworks and legislative development, technical capacity building, and the development of ports to meet "Green Port" standards. Challenges such as shortages of skilled manpower and heavy-duty machinery were highlighted, underscoring the need for training on equipment maintenance, improved sectoral coordination, and comprehensive training for maritime personnel. Focus areas also included advancing sustainable maritime transport through strategic action plans, enhancing safety at sea, exploring port development opportunities, and improving maritime sector skills through training programs. Additional priorities encompassed feasibility studies for Green Shipping Corridors, establishing Open Registries, developing National Seafarers Manning Agencies, improving marine policies, addressing derelict ships, revitalizing the shipbuilding industry, upgrading navigational aids, and addressing skill shortages through targeted capacity-building initiatives.

7. In this connection, the Dialogue recommended:

• Strengthening international cooperation and launching projects to establish national strategies for enhancing maritime connectivity in developing countries with unique situations, such as the Pacific Island countries.

• Promoting pilot projects for international cooperation to strengthen the competitiveness of port infrastructure in the Pacific Island countries.

• Expanding research, capacity building, and training projects in cooperation with international and Pacific-led regional agencies, such as the SPC, to strengthen sustainable
maritime connectivity and port development, based on awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing Small Island Developing States in the Pacific.

8. The Dialogue acknowledged the urgency of promoting decarbonization in the shipping sector and the need for cooperation among member States in this endeavor. The participants emphasized the importance of actively promoting green shipping routes within the region as a catalyst for decarbonization and requested the ESCAP Secretariat to provide opportunities for discussions on green shipping route projects among member States. In this connection, they noted the conclusions of the ESCAP Study on the Implementation Strategy of the Green Shipping Corridor in Asia and the Pacific, which recommended the following:

- Member States need to monitor the progress of proposed Green Shipping Corridors (GSCs) in different regions and prepare to launch several GSCs in the ESCAP region.
- Member States need to develop best practices for developing GSCs from operational, technical, financial, and legal aspects.
- As demonstrated by the GSC Partnership between several port cities, it is recommended to form a public-private partnership (PPP) among stakeholders operating on the route, who are competitors but could collaborate jointly to achieve the decarbonization of the maritime industry in association with public sector entities.
- Digitalization in the context of GSCs should be integrated with existing single window systems at ports to increase the performance of decarbonization of the shipping route and ensure the seamless supply chain of cargo and ship flows on the GSC.
- As some countries (e.g., the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Norway, Greece, and Singapore) have included or planned GSCs into their national action plans and roadmaps, member States should refer to these prior cases as best practices and reflect them in national planning and cooperation with partner ports and countries.

9. The Dialogue recognized the increasing vulnerability of port infrastructure due to the growing intensity and frequency of marine disasters caused by climate change, underscoring the need to promote and cooperate on building disaster-resilient ports. The participants particularly noted that the push for decarbonization in the shipping sector and the increase in marine disasters due to climate change could further weaken the maritime connectivity of vulnerable nations, such as Pacific Island countries with small markets and high disaster susceptibility. Participants concurred on the timeliness of ESCAP’s ongoing projects for Pacific Island ports and agreed that cooperation and support should be strengthened to enhance maritime connectivity for developing countries in special situations, SIDS and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).

10. The Dialogue confirmed that the rapid development of smart digital applications could play a significant role in achieving sustainable and inclusive maritime connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region. In this connection, the participants took note of the key findings of the recently completed ESCAP project on improving the safety of navigation and the sustainability of shipping through the introduction of innovative autonomous shipping technologies in the Asia-Pacific region, which recommended:

3
• Development of dedicated national plans, covering policy and regulatory framework based on relevant International Maritime Organization (IMO) regulations, training and upskilling development, universities’ research and development, public engagement and awareness, investment in infrastructure and “sandboxes”, and monitoring and evaluation.

• Strengthening regional cooperation through establishing forums or platforms for knowledge exchange, joint research and training projects, and participation in the development of legal frameworks for Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS).

• Considering potential joint projects and key technical solutions for their implementation, as identified by the project findings.

11. The Dialogue noted the opportunities offered by the Pacific Ports 2030-2050 Recognition Framework and had a specific session dedicated to the Pacific One-Maritime Framework (POMF), supported by the SPC with the goal of addressing and responding to needs, priorities, challenges and emerging issues in the maritime sector in the Pacific focusing on safety and security, decarbonization efforts, cost and access for remote communities.

12. The Dialogue also recognized the ongoing support of the IMO, Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the AIFFP and other development actors, and their continued investment in port infrastructure in the Pacific and research analysis and knowledge products responding to environmental changes are key assets for the development of maritime transport in the Pacific region. The participants emphasized that cooperation and partnership with all stakeholders, including member States, international and regional organizations, sub-regional institutions, Multilateral Development Banks, research institutes, and the private sector, is essential for the practical implementation of regional and national strategies to promote sustainable maritime transport development.

13. Participants expressed deep gratitude and welcomed the platform provided by the Regional Dialogue on Sustainable Maritime Connectivity for discussion and cooperation on major maritime issues among ESCAP member States and relevant regional and international organizations. They requested the ESCAP Secretariat to systematically provide such opportunities, preferably on an annual basis, rotating within the sub-regions of Asia-Pacific, to expand and strengthen cooperation with other international organizations. In this connection, they took note of the planned 2025 edition of the Regional Dialogue taking place in South Asia, focusing on South, Southwest, and Central Asian countries. They were also informed of the ESCAP’s upcoming project on “Moving towards efficient, resilient, low carbon and accessible port cities in Asia-Pacific Small Island Developing States to achieve better transport connectivity and accessibility for all”, supported by the United Nations Development Account.

14. Participants expressed their appreciation to regional and international experts who delivered presentations during the Dialogue and requested that multidimensional cooperation on these issues continue and be strengthened through analytical work, capacity building, and technical assistance.

15. Participants thanked the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Korea Maritime Institute for their financial and substantive support in organizing this Dialogue and implementing the project “Advancing Regional Cooperation Policies on Sustainable Maritime
Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific (2024-2025). Participants also expressed gratitude to the presenters and attendees, as well as the SPC and the FPCL for their support in organizing this edition of the Regional Dialogue.

16. Participants requested the Secretariat to report to the Committee on Transport the conclusions of this dialogue, which emphasized major challenges in the shipping and port sector and responses to them, such as promoting decarbonization in the shipping and port sector, strengthening digitalization, and enhancing the resiliency of the port sector in response to climate change.

17. These conclusions were agreed upon in Nadi, Fiji, and online between 23 July and 8 August 2024.