

**Speech by the Minister for Fisheries, Hon. Semi
Koroilavesau**

2nd Asia-Pacific Day of the Ocean

Bangkok, Thailand, 8 November 2019

*“The Ocean: Challenges and Opportunities for Small Island
Developing States”*

Madam Executive Secretary

Honorable Ministers

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

Action to protect our Ocean cannot wait. The challenge before us is great. The challenge before us is unprecedented. And the challenge before us will nevertheless be met when we all unite to protect our Ocean.

Emboldened by the stark reality that there is only one ocean and one planet, Small Island Developing States are pushing the boundaries of collaboration and cooperation to protect it. We are

strengthening existing partnerships and creating new ones; we are leveraging existing mechanisms and platforms while encouraging new ones. While we rely on the spirit of solidarity which endorsed the 2030 Agenda, we must also find other alternatives to project our voices. To this end, I would like to acknowledge the work of Ambassador Peter Thomson, the Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, which has been the very embodiment of this.

The 2030 Agenda provided a starting point for the integration of numerous challenges into one conceptual framework for action. Under Goal 14, it recognises the role of the Ocean for future economic, social and ecological development. But where this framework lacks clarity especially in some of the current oceans conversation, such as a sustainable blue economy – to be discussed in one of today's parallel sessions – we need platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Day of the Ocean to keep the discussion going. And hopefully, conclude with something tangible and concrete.

We see a lot of encouraging developments. Since the first UN High-Level Oceans Conference in 2017 to the recently

concluded *Our Oceans Conference* in Norway, voluntary and bold commitments continue to increase. The G7 and G20 have also put up their hands. The powerful and the prosperous are backing up their political commitments with tangible actions. By the time we reach the second UN High-Level Oceans Conference in Portugal next year, we expect to see more commitments.

Oceans in Asia and the Pacific cover 40% of the earth's surface. And 30% of that is the Pacific Ocean. 14 billion pounds of trash are dumped into the Pacific every year and 90% is plastic. When you add the impact of climate change, and other activities of extreme consequences, we are not in a very good shape. That in a nutshell is our challenge.

For Pacific SIDS, we are turning challenges into opportunities because our circumstances will not change.

The "Blue Pacific" vision encapsulates our overall strategy of reclaiming the Ocean. It reinforces our solidarity, and through its lense, we look at other intertwining issues.

Our Leaders, in 2010, endorsed the Framework for Pacific Oceanscape. It establishes the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner which was set up in 2014, and the Pacific Ocean Alliance.

Recognising the diversity of issues confronting us, we are reforming and reshaping our regional architecture to respond better to our needs. Platforms and mechanisms have been created to leverage, amongst others, the knowledge and expertise of academia, the private sector, CSOs and NGOs.

We are fulfilling our voluntary commitments made at the first high-level United Nations Oceans Conference in 2017.

We are actively engaged in the BBNJ negotiations, and we hope the outcome will reflect the will of our people as articulated by our Leaders in global and regional forums.

At the Pacific Forum Leaders Retreat this year in Tuvalu, we signed the *Kanaki II Declaration* which, amongst other things, recognised the climate-ocean nexus and called on Parties

attending COP25 to consider a work programme on oceans within the UNFCCC process.

Next week, Fiji will host the first Pacific Ocean Finance Conference. Its objective is to consider innovative financing mechanisms.

Under the Pacific Blue Partnership, Fiji and the Marshall Islands are leading a coalition of seven Pacific Island Countries committed to reducing fossil fuel use by our domestic and regional shipping by 40% by 2030 and achieving zero carbon emissions by 2050. I am pleased to note that Session B on the theme “Sustainability Compass” will discuss this issue.

Fiji is developing its Ocean Policy Framework, which will provide a strong foundation for an Integrated Ocean Management Policy.

Moving forward, we are confident that Pacific SIDS initiatives can inform ESCAP’s approach to protecting the Ocean. Given ESCAP’s important role in Asia-Pacific’s sustainable

development, and to further bolster the work at the regional level, I would like offer four suggestions.

Firstly, strengthen regional cooperation. The Ocean is our collective national interest in the Pacific. And regional cooperation can also best serve national interests. This would provide mechanisms through which Member States could cooperate towards the harmonised implementation of the 2030 Agenda for the oceans, especially SDG14. Moreover, regional cooperation is well placed to respond to the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda. To this end, I am happy to note – and indeed the Fijian Government – that the theme of the 76th Commission Session is “Promoting economic, social and environmental cooperation on oceans for sustainable development”.

Secondly, encourage Member States to consider an ocean governance policy for Asia-Pacific. While the implementation of SDG14 is first and foremost a national endeavour, it still falls short of the transformative ambition of the 2030 Agenda without effective coordination between Member States in particular at the regional level. In this regard, I encourage ESCAP to facilitate a dialogue on ocean governance.

Thirdly, encourage Member States to consider the Ocean's role in the climate system. Fiji's Ocean Pathway launched during COP23 advocates this and again the Pacific Forum Leaders through the *Kanaki II Declaration* underscored the need for an ocean work programme in the UNFCCC process.

Lastly, partner with us to advance the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership and decarbonise the shipping industry by 2050.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that for Pacific SIDS the Ocean is us. As a compatriot of mine once said, "*we sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood*". It is our identity. And an identity grounded in something as vast as the Ocean heightens the urgency to protect it. Individually and collectively, the Ocean will always be our permanent interest. It is eternal and perpetual, and it is our duty to follow it.

I thank you.