



# AUSTRALIA



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## UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

8 December 2015

### Agenda item 79: Oceans and Law of the Sea

**Statement by Gillian Bird**

**Ambassador and Permanent Representative**

**Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations**

**On behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum**

**(Check against delivery)**

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Mr President, Excellencies and distinguished delegates

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members represented at the United Nations: Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Australia.

The Pacific Islands Forum members are constituents of large ocean States. Our combined ocean space of around forty million square kilometers of ocean and islands are bigger than the landmass of China, Canada, the US, India and Australia, combined. Our people's lives, our cultures, and our identities are intrinsically intertwined with the oceans. Our livelihood has largely been sustained for centuries through the resources of the oceans. For us, our ocean is our home and our future.

This is why the Pacific Islands Forum, as a region, has shown global leadership in marine conservation and management – from our traditional marine area based management, the implementation of marine protected areas, to the adoption of innovative and ambitious solutions such as vessel day trading schemes for fisheries conservation and sustainable development.

Yet, despite our tremendous efforts and ambitions, our work will remain in vain without genuine and durable partnerships of the international community.

Mr President

The work of the Pacific Islands Forum on oceans is underpinned by UNCLOS and augmented by our Pacific Oceanscape Framework that addresses issues concerning the health, productivity and resilience of our Pacific Ocean.

To coordinate, guide and drive this agenda forward in our region we have appointed a Pacific Oceans Commissioner, who guided and led our inaugural and successful Pacific Oceans Alliance meeting in July 2015 in Suva that addressed oceans-related issues, including the evolving developments on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

In September 2015, Pacific Leaders at the 46th Pacific Islands Forum in Papua New Guinea adopted the Roadmap for Pacific Sustainable Fisheries with the main focus on oceans and fisheries, which followed on from the 45th session held in Palau in 2014 on “The Ocean: Life and Future”. This Roadmap represents a significant achievement and milestone for us as a region and further underscores the Pacific region’s unwavering collective commitment to conservation and sustainable use of the oceans.

The Roadmap articulates the outcomes the region seeks from sustainable fisheries, and specific strategies to achieve those outcomes, including strengthening rights-based management approaches, adoption of target reference points and harvest strategies, leveraging additional development opportunities for small island developing States, enhancing community based management and increasing employment and the contribution of fisheries to food security, nutrition supply and livelihoods.

Our Leaders again reaffirmed the central importance of increasing economic returns and ensuring the sustainable management of fisheries including the eventual transition to catch-based systems. It was also acknowledged that the current effort based management system had brought significant economic returns to Parties to the Nauru Agreement.

Mr President

It was for this reason that the Pacific Islands Forum members pursued a number of text proposals in this year’s Sustainable Fisheries resolution. We were pleased that, on the basis of our proposals, some key substantive improvements were made to the resolution.

In particular, a clearer focus on the need for target reference points in fisheries management; the need to improve data reporting to regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) and to clamp down on incomplete reporting which makes fisheries management decisions within RFMOs difficult; the need for RFMOs to take into

account the special requirements of developing countries and ensure that the disproportionate burden of conservation action is not placed on SIDS.

We were however, disappointed that a recognition of the Roadmap for Pacific Sustainable Fisheries was not incorporated in the resolution. This Roadmap represents a shared vision of the region in the management of its key oceans and marine resource conservation and management and, like other regional initiatives before it, should have been reflected.

An acknowledgment of the Roadmap would have been an important stride in our quest for fair and equitable returns from our oceans and marine resources, which regrettably remains inadequate.

Mr President

Looking forward to 2016, the Pacific Islands Forum members welcome the decision taken by the General Assembly to develop an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and to establish a Preparatory Committee to make recommendations on the elements of a draft text for such an instrument by the end of 2017.

We note that the Pacific Island Forum Leaders expressed their strong support for launching these negotiations and the Pacific intends to engage actively in these negotiations beginning in March 2016. The region is committed to achieving substantive progress on this issue. We are pleased that one of our PIF members – Nauru – will serve on the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee.

As custodians of a vast expanse of oceans and seas, Pacific Islands Forum members championed the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas and their marine resources for sustainable development, which now forms an integral part of the 2030 Agenda adopted this September by world leaders.

This represents a significant achievement and an acknowledgement by the international community of the fundamental importance of oceans to global sustainable development; a recognition that was missing in the Millennium Development Goals.

We would urge all States to commit to the full and effective implementation of SDG 14, including through supporting an effective process for follow up and review of the goals and targets. We are committed to do our part.

Mr President

Our strong ties with the oceans and seas also drove our co-sponsorship and support for the joint initiative of Fiji and Sweden on the UN Conference in June 2017 in Suva on the implementation of SDG 14. This is an important contribution to build political momentum and support for the implementation of SDG 14, that brings together all stakeholders.

This same commitment underpins our strong support for marine protected areas. The Pacific continues to lead the way on oceans management and we are proud that there continue to be significant marine sanctuaries announced in our region, including the new 620,000 square kilometre ocean sanctuary surrounding the Kermadec Islands in the southwest Pacific announced by New Zealand during UNGA70 Leaders' Week, and the National Marine Sanctuary in Palau which encompasses the entire country's exclusive economic zone of more than half a million square kilometres, which became law on 28th of October this year.

Thank you Mr President.