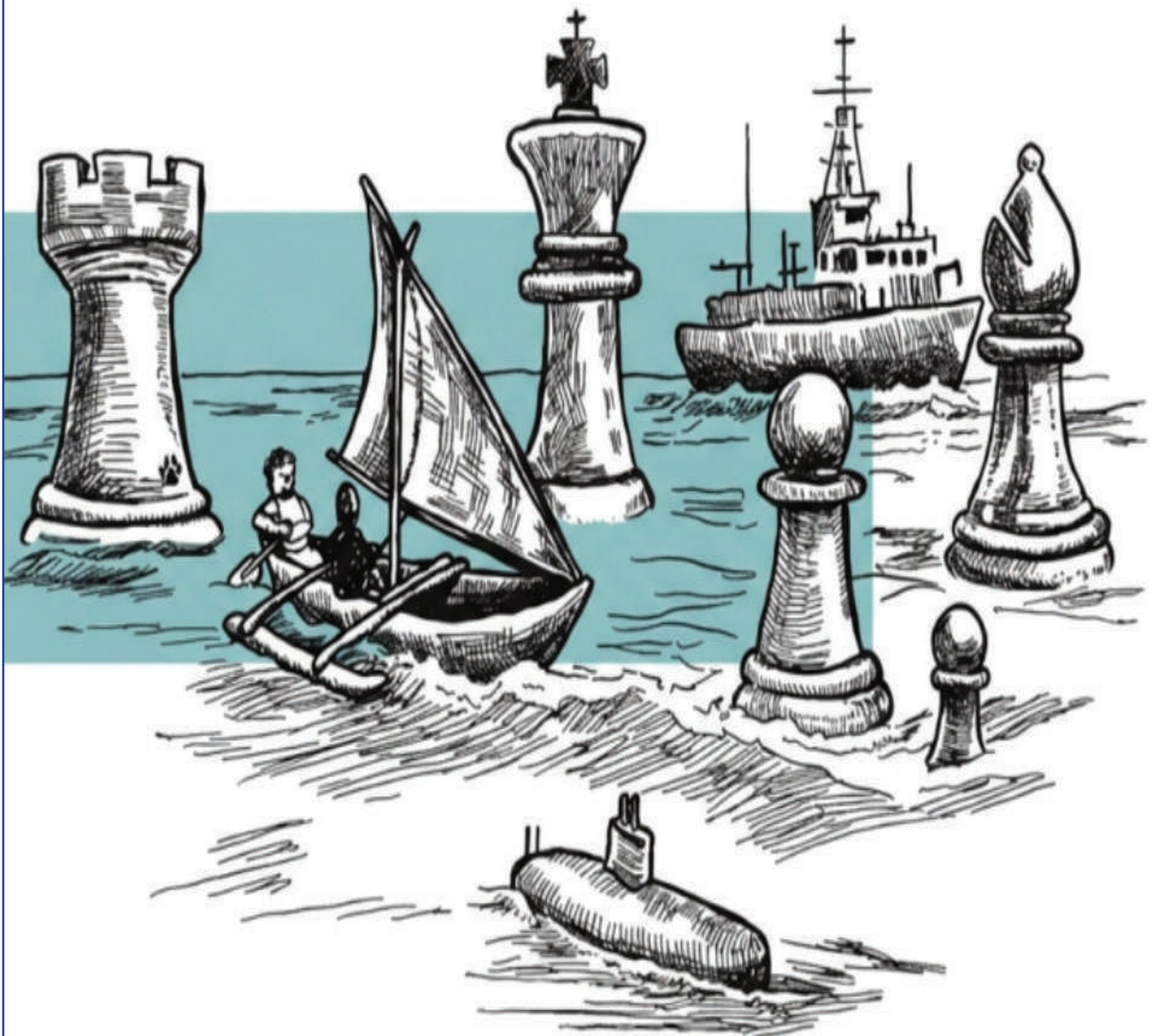




STATE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN 2026





The State of the Pacific Ocean Convening was organised in collaboration with



Foreward:

An Excerpt from Dame Meg Taylor's Keynote

I want to begin by acknowledging this day — World Ocean Day — and the significance of this convening. Our history is rooted in a vast oceanic realm — communities of extraordinary ingenuity, navigators who mastered the stars, currents, and wind patterns, who built networks of society, trade, and culture spanning thousands of miles.

The colonial period reshaped our social, economic, and political landscapes, and the divisions of the Pacific we recognise today are a direct product of those colonial ambitions. Our regional institutions were themselves born from that moment: the South Pacific Commission was established not for us, but to consolidate the influence and management of our region by the metropolitan powers — Britain, France, the Netherlands, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. I name this history not to dwell on grievance, but because it is the honest starting point for understanding what Pacific peoples subsequently chose to do: reclaim our institutions, assert our agency, and build something genuinely our own.

From the 1970s, Pacific states began playing a pivotal role in shaping the international legal order governing the oceans. Our sustained participation in the negotiation and adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was one of the most consequential contributions small states have ever made to international law. We argued for the creation of exclusive economic zones extending up to two hundred nautical miles from the coastline — granting coastal states special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources. The 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga stands as perhaps the most profound expression of our regional unity — the first nuclear-free zone in a populated region of the world, a collective assertion of our right to shape our own security and environmental policies without outside interference. We established the Forum Fisheries Agency against significant opposition from

major fishing and maritime powers — and we did so even before UNCLOS was concluded, such was our urgency to assert collective control over our marine resources. We founded SOPAC and SPREP. We successfully campaigned to ban driftnet fishing in the South-West Pacific, protecting fish stocks valued at \$2–3 billion annually. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement transformed the management of the skipjack tuna fishery, which today accounts for around 50 per cent of our exports to Europe.

Our regional architecture faces genuine tensions. The Forum's inclusion of Australia and New Zealand has at times made it more difficult to sustain unified positions on issues — particularly climate change — where metropolitan interests diverge from Pacific priorities. At times, Pacific states themselves have found it difficult to hold collective positions under sustained external pressure, and the pursuit of short-term bilateral advantage has sometimes come at the cost of long-term regional coherence. The great power competition now playing out across our region adds a further layer of complexity. The Pacific has become strategically significant to the United States, China, and their respective allies in ways that were not true a generation ago. Initiatives have emerged — sometimes with limited consultation with Pacific Island nations — that embed our region within frameworks driven by external strategic priorities rather than Pacific ones. The expansion of military infrastructure, proposals to host foreign submarines and strategic bombers within the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, the framing of our region primarily through a security lens — these developments sit uneasily alongside the vision of peace that the Treaty of Rarotonga represents. And then there is the question of economic independence — which I think is the most

*"The ocean has always been our highway, our home,
our identity. Let us govern it as ours."*

- Dame Meg Taylor



important structural question we face as a region.

But we have not been passive in the face of these pressures; we have responded creatively, persistently, and with considerable effect. The Blue Pacific Continent narrative, declared in 2017, was a strategic act of self-definition. By naming ourselves a continent, we stepped out of the framing of small, vulnerable, peripheral states and asserted instead a shared political, legal, and oceanic identity. We secured the 1.5-degree temperature goal in the 2015 Paris Agreement — a direct result of Pacific diplomatic persistence. We led negotiations on the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction. We adopted the 2021 Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones, asserting that maritime boundaries established under UNCLOS must remain permanent despite sea-level rise. This is sovereignty through law — a measured yet profound legal stance that protects the very foundations of ocean statehood in the face of an existential physical threat.

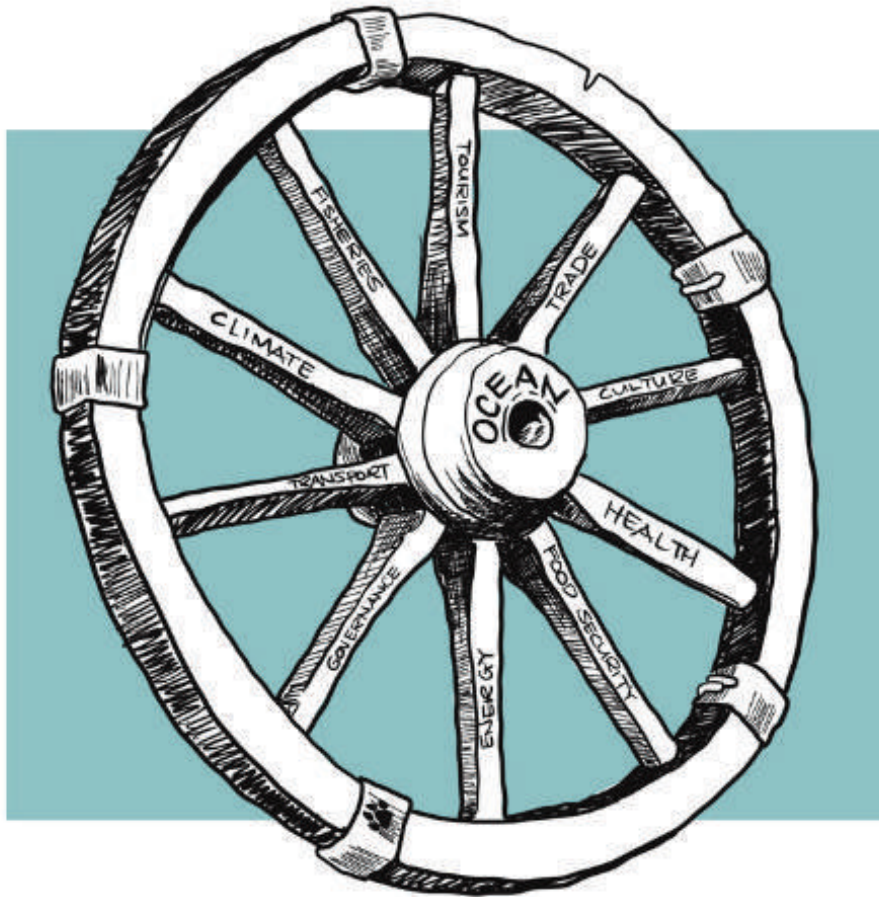
And then there is the ICJ Advisory Opinion — which I regard as one of the most significant achievements of Pacific diplomacy and Pacific civil society in decades. Vanuatu's initiative to seek that Advisory Opinion began — and this matters deeply — with students at the law school in Vanuatu. Pacific youth, understanding that international law could be a tool, that small states could move the world's largest court, and acting on that understanding. The Advisory Opinion confirmed that climate change constitutes a quintessentially universal risk, that all states are bound by stringent duties of prevention and due diligence, and that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions constitute pollution of the marine environment under UNCLOS. The Court integrated climate obligations with international human rights law — recognising that harm to the climate system directly threatens fundamental rights. And just

this week the Government of Vanuatu tabled a United Nations General Assembly resolution urging all member states to fulfil their obligations following the ICJ Advisory Opinion — and it passed with 144 votes.

Despite our achievements, our region's continued reliance on external funding creates a vulnerability we must address honestly and strategically. When institutions depend on external resources, questions of ownership, direction, and accountability inevitably follow. And amid intensifying great-power competition, donors' strategic interests can shift, affecting what our institutions are asked to do. Our regional governance is also complicated by overlapping mandates among institutions and by competition for funding that can undermine the coherence and cooperation we need. These are solvable problems — but they require us to be frank about them.

The Pacific Resilience Facility, which fifteen Forum Leaders signed in Honiara in September 2025, points in the right direction. Domiciled in Tonga, designed by Pacific peoples, governed by Pacific institutions and focused on building community resilience rather than deepening dependency, it is a model of what Pacific-owned development can look like. What we are asking for is a partnership that is genuinely aligned with our strategies and priorities, starting with the 2050 Strategy. This gathering has a particular role in holding that conversation. And my deepest hope is that we, and in particular our younger generation of Pacific Islanders, will hold fast to the vision of the 2050 Strategy for a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, where all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy, and productive lives. The ocean has always been our highway, our home, our identity. Let us govern it as ours.

Centering the ocean in everything



THE OCEAN IS NOT ANOTHER SPOKE ON
THE WHEEL....IT'S THE HUB

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State of the

Day 1



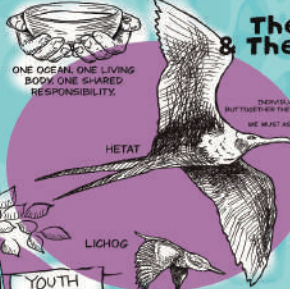
The Oceans Blessing



FOR WHAT YOU DO TODAY
THE OCEAN REMEMBERS



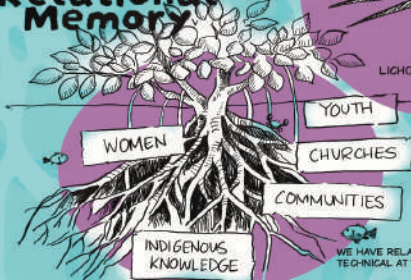
ONE OCEAN, ONE LIVING
BODY, ONE SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY.



The Frigate & The Kingfisher

INDIVIDUALLY THEY'RE JUST BIRDS.
BUT TOGETHER THEY'RE VERY UNLIKE. FOR NAVIGATION,
WE MUST HOLD ON TO OUR IDENTITY AS ONE.

Relational Memory



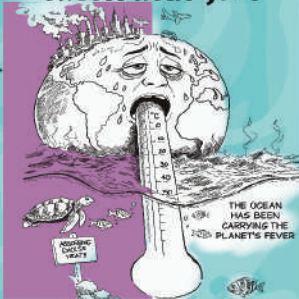
WE HAVE RELATIONAL MEMORY. LET'S NOT BE TOO
TECH-NICAL AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR VALUES.

Healthy Oceans Healthy Communities



THE HEALTH OF THE OCEAN REFLECTS
THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE.

Where has the planets excess heat gone



Ocean Climate Nexus



The ocean
is not beside
the climate.
It is breathing it.

THE WORLD CALLS IT A CRISIS. THE
PACIFIC KNEW IT WAS 1.



Day 2



SECURITY & MILITARISATION BLUE RESOURCING

WE'RE REALLY GOOD AT SAILING. WE
NEED TO GET BETTER AT PATCHING.

Island chain in Military logic

we can't just react, we
must get better with
preventative measures

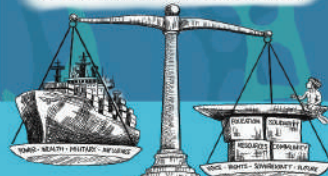
Potential Liability



THE PACIFIC IS NOT
A WAREHOUSE

OUR OCEAN IS NOT AN ENDLESS
RESOURCE TO BE EXTRACTED

Ocean Stewardship



IF WE CAN'T MAKE THE STRONG FAIR,
THEN WE MUST MAKE THE WEAK STRONG

Some empires leave without letting go



Net Positive Mining

IN OTHER WORDS:



BRO, YOUR TYRE'S FLAT

IT'S OK, I LOOK AFTER MY
NEIGHBORS TYRES



Day 3

Day 3



Day 4



Executive Summary

The Ocean has long been key to the survival and wellbeing of Pacific peoples. It is the foundation of our cultures, economies, food systems, histories, relationships and futures. The health of the ocean and the health of Pacific communities are inseparable. When the ocean is declining in health, Pacific peoples and many smaller island states bear the consequences. When the ocean thrives, we as ocean communities thrive. Our region stands at a pivotal moment as we face increasing pressures that threaten sovereignty and our ability to determine our own futures. The region's vision articulated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent recognises that a healthy, functioning ocean environment is crucial to the health and productivity of Pacific communities. However, with overlapping threats to ocean governance, researchers and experts warn that a "polycrisis" of environmental, geopolitical, and economic pressures is outpacing the region's current regulatory ability. The inaugural State of the Pacific Ocean Convening (SOTPOC) is a strategic regional dialogue centred around addressing the mounting environmental, economic, and geopolitical pressures threatening the sovereignty and resources of the Pacific region brought together Pacific leaders, parliamentarians, academics, lawyers, Indigenous knowledge holders, civil society organisations, church representatives, youth leaders and regional partners to reflect on the current and emerging challenges facing the Blue Pacific. Anchored in the spirit of "World Oceans Day," the convening was an opportunity to move beyond fragmented discussions of oceans, the health of the Pacific Ocean, climate change, biodiversity, blue economy, pollution, militarisation, security and development by examining these issues holistically and through a distinctly Pacific lens. A view consistently articulated by the participants was

that the Pacific Ocean cannot be understood simply as an environmental resource or economic asset to be plundered. Rather, it represents identity, genealogy, culture, spirituality, livelihoods and the collective future of Pacific peoples. The convening reaffirmed the belief that Pacific peoples have protected and cared for the ocean for as long as they have populated the islands, through customary knowledge systems, relational governance, and reciprocal responsibilities. Participants argued that these traditions continue to guide contemporary ocean governance and should be acknowledged and recognised alongside Western scientific research and international law. The questions of sovereignty and self-determination surrounding ocean governance featured strongly throughout the convening. Related to this issue was the identification of the continuing influence of colonial structures within contemporary development, resource governance, and security arrangements. Participants noted that many outside initiatives continue to reproduce extractive relationships despite being packaged as sustainable development, the blue economy, or climate solutions. Participants repeatedly called for resistance to neocolonialism and new forms of recolonisation, while advocating for greater Pacific ownership over decisions affecting the future of the Pacific Ocean. Participants acknowledged the growing militarisation of the Pacific and its implications for regional peace, environmental protection and human security. They highlighted the enduring relevance of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement, arguing that its principles of peace, justice, self-determination, and environmental stewardship remain vital for addressing contemporary geopolitical tensions and the climate crisis. The concept of an Ocean of Peace emerged as an

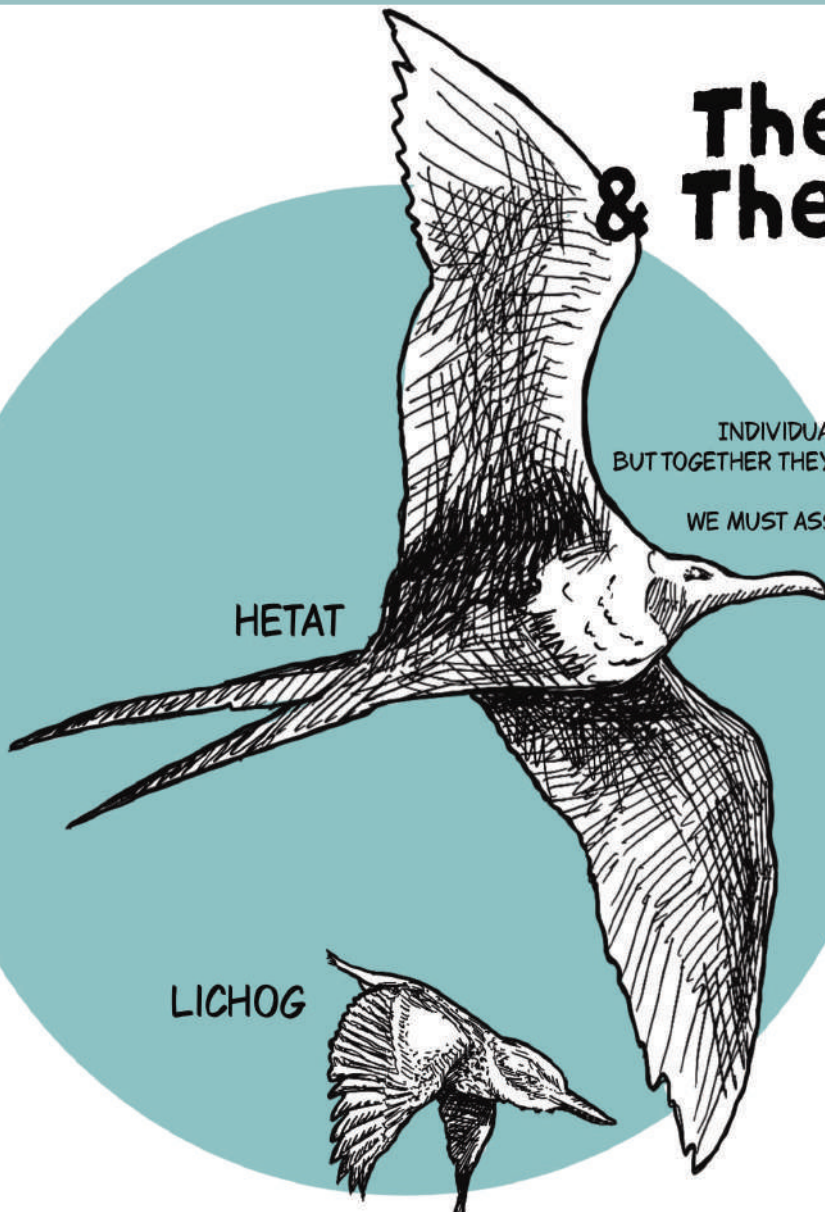
The Frigate & The Kingfisher

INDIVIDUALLY THEY'RE JUST BIRDS
BUT TOGETHER THEY'RE VERY USEFUL FOR NAVIGATION

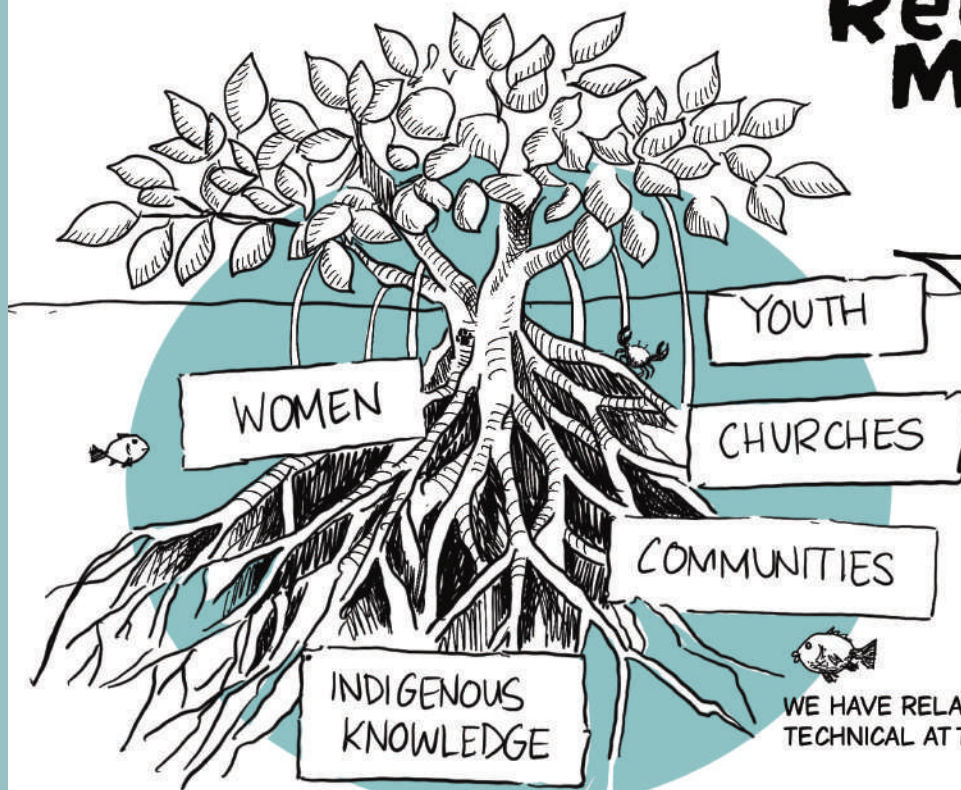
WE MUST ASSUME OUR IDENTITY AS ONE

HETAT

LICHOG



Relational Memory

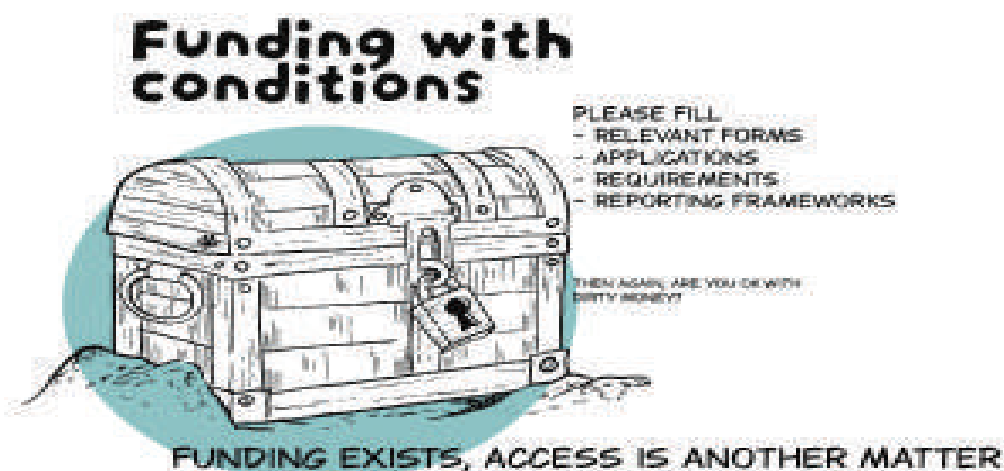


Movements
grow where
few people
are looking.

WE HAVE RELATIONAL MEMORY. LET'S NOT BE TOO
TECHNICAL AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR VALUES

important framework for linking climate action, peacebuilding, security, and ocean governance. Deep Sea Mining (DSM) featured prominently in discussions not simply as a resource management issue but as a broader symbol of competing and conflicting visions for Pacific development. Participants challenged narratives that frame extraction as imperative for progress and development, with little detrimental impact on oceans, even in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary. They strongly expressed the need for precautionary approaches, independent scientific research, strengthened legal advocacy and greater Pacific coordination in international negotiations on issues related to DSM. The convening also explored the important question of development finance and resourcing. Participants reflected on declining Official Development Assistance, the increasing restrictions and conditions attached to funding, and the limited proportion of resources reaching Pacific-led organisations and grassroots movements. Discussions highlighted the importance of flexible funding, greater transparency, and increased investment in Pacific-controlled mechanisms that support long-term movement building, community leadership, and ethical financing. One of the strongest outcomes was the recognition that future progress on ocean-related ques-

tions depends not only on improved policies but also on stronger networks and relationships. SOT-POC now calls for deeper collaboration among governments, parliamentarians, Indigenous leaders, customary institutions, researchers, lawyers, churches, youth movements, academics, and civil society organisations to address the challenges posed by the state of the Pacific Ocean. Rather than creating new parallel initiatives and working in isolation from one another, the convening emphasised strengthening existing movements, breaking the institutional silos and fostering greater solidarity across sectors and generations. In conclusion, the SOTPOC moved beyond identifying challenges towards articulating a shared Pacific vision for the future. This vision places Pacific agency, Indigenous knowledge, justice, reciprocity and stewardship at the centre of ocean governance while recognising that protecting the ocean requires coordinated action on climate change, peacebuilding, economic justice, biodiversity conservation and cultural revitalisation. This marks not only an audit of the state of the Pacific Ocean, but also an important step towards strengthening a Pacific-led and Pacific-wide movement committed to protecting the Pacific Ocean as the foundation of Pacific identity, wellbeing and security for future generations.





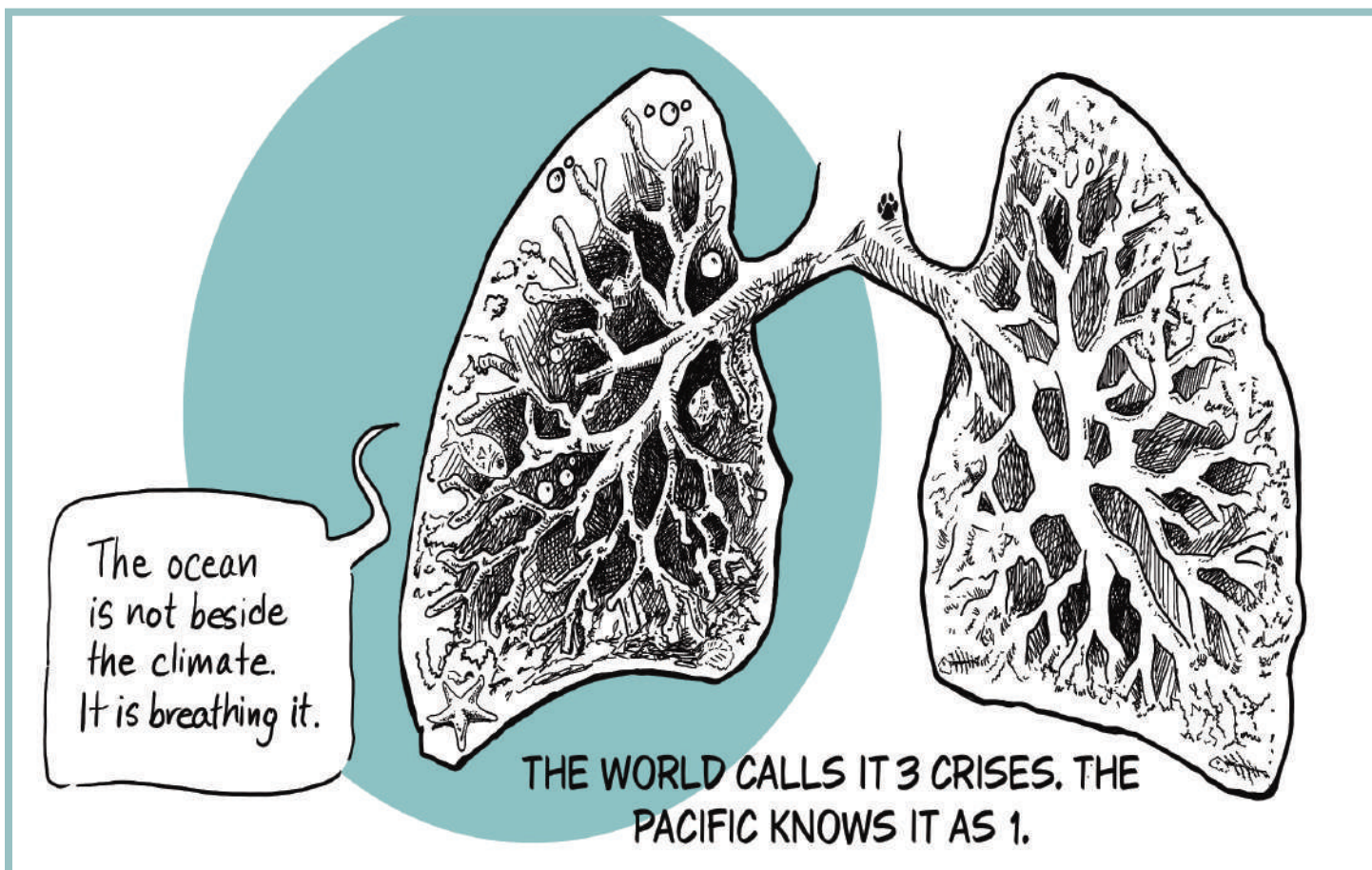
Participants on the first day of the State of the Pacific Ocean



...n convening at the Pasifika Communities University (PCU).



State of Our Oceans: Taking a Pulse of the Pacific



Ocean Climate Nexus

Main Plenary Presentations and Discussion

A view repeatedly expressed at this Convening was that climate and ocean issues cannot be treated as separate policy domains but must be treated as inextricably linked. Presentations were critical of Western developmental and governance frameworks that compartmentalise climate, biodiversity, pollution, fisheries, security, and development, arguing that Pacific peoples and their knowledge systems have long understood these issues as interconnected.

To this end, Vanuatu's Minister for Climate Change Adaptation, Energy, Environment, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards and Disaster Management, Hon. Ralph Regenvanu said: "The Western mindset separates the two. In our culture there is no separation."

Hon. Regenvanu further emphasised the need to mainstream the ocean-climate nexus into international climate discussions and announced Vanuatu's efforts to pursue a global scientific assessment of deep-sea ecosystems.

Discussions reinforced that climate change is not simply an environmental challenge but impacts governance, economic, and security challenges, and, most importantly, justice for Pacific peoples. It was argued that climate policy must move beyond emissions targets and recognise the interconnected pressures affecting Ocean systems.

Dr Rufino Varea from the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN) argued that climate conversations require urgent recalibration, noting that the 1.5° Celsius threshold has effectively been crossed and that climate planning based solely on central projection scenarios significantly underestimates future risks.

He pointed out that humanity has crossed seven of the nine planetary boundaries and drew

attention to the processes of committed warming, sea-level rise, Antarctic ice melt, warming oceans, and coral reef decline, as well as the disruption of major ocean circulation systems, already in motion and not easily reversible.

Dr Varea also highlighted the problematic idea of "overshoot," based on the assumption that humanity will pull massive amounts of carbon from the atmosphere at a later point to restore some kind of balance, noting that the technology doesn't exist.

Lawyer Maria Goreti-Muavesi from Conservation International (CI) made the important point that the Pacific is not short on laws and policies to protect biodiversity. She added that the real issue was in the implementation of these laws.

"So, we have also seen strong conservation efforts, such as marine protected areas and regional fisheries management, through the mechanisms that are in place in the region. But in some cases, we risk creating 'paper parks.'

Areas that are perfected in law, but not effectively managed or enforced in practice." Another key issue highlighted was the strong connection between climate change and militarisation. Participants identified military emissions, an expanding security infrastructure, and geopolitical competition as significant yet often overlooked contributors to climate risk. They also expressed grave concern that international climate processes continue to exempt military activities from meaningful accountability, leaving a major gap in global climate governance.

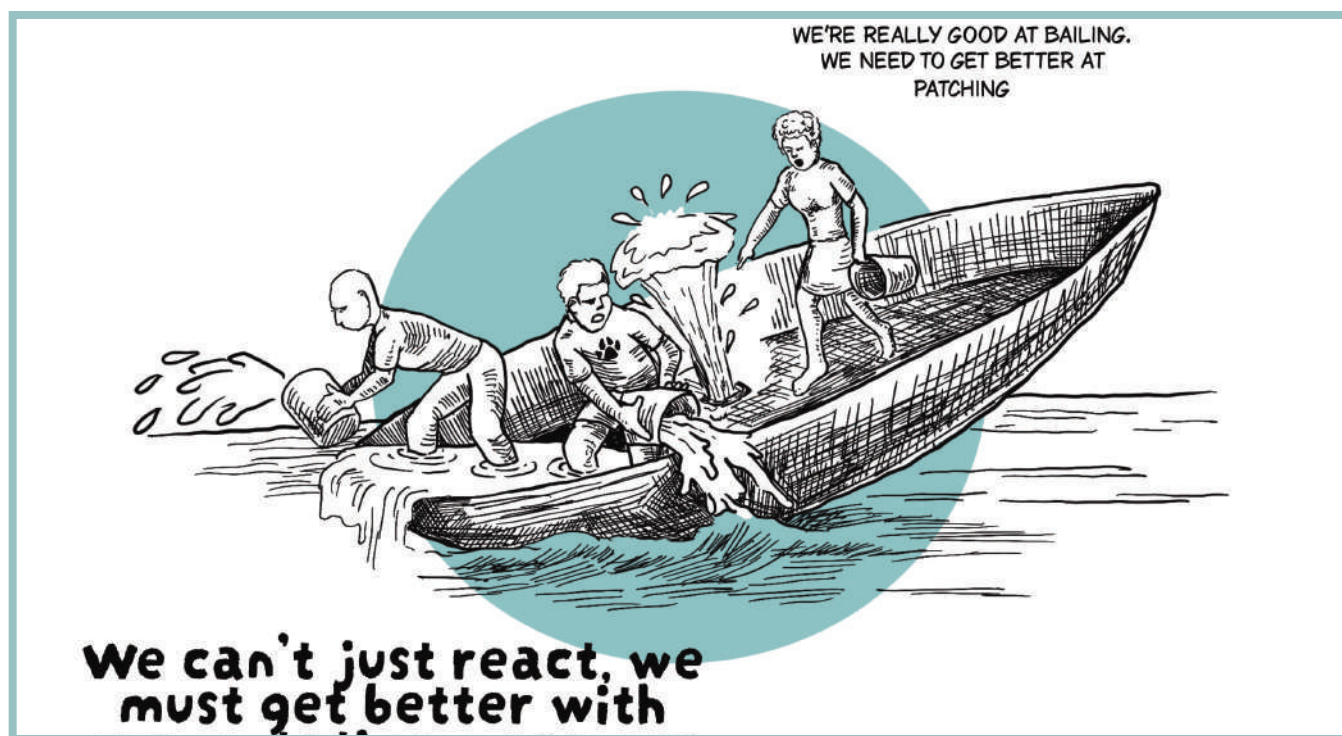
Discussion also emphasised that climate adaptation should not become another avenue for extractive development. Speakers questioned whether emerging

concepts such as climate finance, critical minerals, carbon markets and elements of the blue economy genuinely serve Pacific priorities or simply reproduce older colonial patterns of exploitation in new guises.

Day 3 strengthened the climate discussion by reframing climate change as part of broader conversations about extractivism, militarisation, and economic dependency. Participants reiterated their call that climate policy needed to resist “false solu-

envisaging it as a regional initiative that could ultimately evolve into a treaty and complement existing Pacific leadership on climate action.

Day 4 reinforced the view that climate action requires more than technical solutions; it requires political will, agency, community mobilisation, and sustained resourcing. Participants seriously questioned whether Pacific sovereignty can be fully attained while development pathways remain



tions” such as geoengineering, carbon markets, marine carbon dioxide removal, and forms of climate finance that perpetuate extractive models.

Discussions increasingly centred on the need for integrated research that links the climate emergency to deep-sea mining, nuclear legacies, military emissions, and fossil fuel dependency. Participants overwhelmingly endorsed Vanuatu’s proposed independent Deep Ocean Ecosystem Assessment and called for stronger Pacific-led scientific and legal research to inform international negotiations. Participants also proposed advancing a Pacific Fossil Fuel Free Extraction Zone,

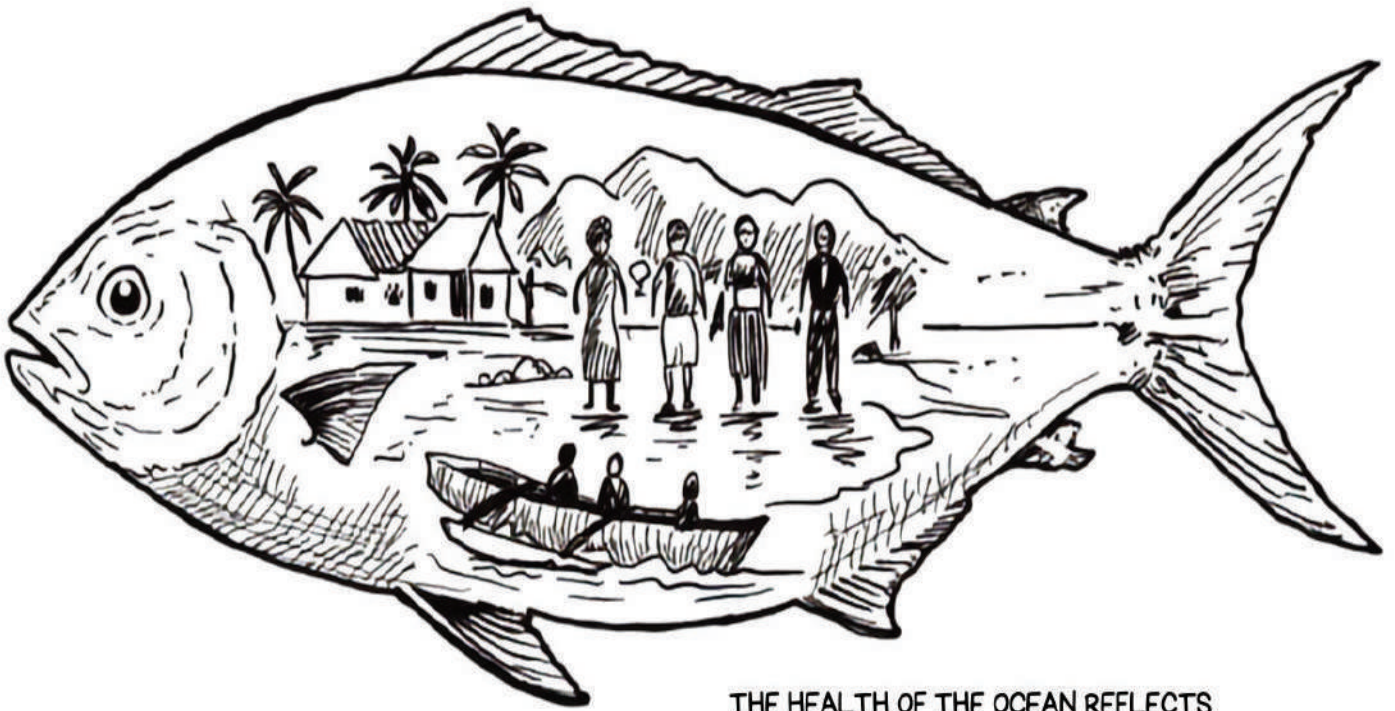
shaped by external financing institutions and donor priorities. Discussions highlighted the importance of political economy in understanding climate governance and the need to address structural dependencies alongside environmental challenges.

Discussions over the four days strengthened links between climate action, peacebuilding and ocean governance. Participants argued that the Ocean of Peace Declaration provides an important political framework for connecting climate resilience, security, gender equality and ocean stewardship rather than treating them as separate policy agendas.

Caucus Reflections

- The Lawyers and Academics Caucus expressed concern that climate policy processes often fail to adequately integrate ocean issues and that no clear regional ocean-climate governance framework currently exists. Hence, they called for stronger integration between climate, biodiversity, food security, Indigenous governance, and ocean management, which was identified as essential.
- The Lawyers and Academics Caucus proposed the need for research that reflected Pacific realities rather than externally imposed agendas and called for post-colonial and decolonial research methodologies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and stronger links between scientific evidence and Indigenous Knowledge.
- The Parliamentary Caucus pointed out that people at different levels had different understandings of the current climate crisis, and called for this knowledge to be made universally available to all stakeholders and Pacific peoples.
- The Indigenous Caucus pointed out that there was great diversity of cultures and opinions in the Pacific regarding climate and ocean issues, but suggested this diversity needed to be seen as a strength: “We must elevate ourselves above individual and political divisions and speak in one voice as people of the ocean.”
- Civil Society Groups stressed that Pacific peoples must define climate security for themselves rather than allowing security agendas to be determined by geopolitical competition.
- Civil Society Groups also highlighted the need to strengthen national capacity so communities can engage confidently in international climate negotiations.
- Participants stressed the need to communicate climate science more effectively to professionals and laypeople, including policymakers, journalists, communities, churches, and regional institutions.
- Participants suggested that civil society organisations could play an important role in translating complex technical information into accessible narratives to influence policy.
- Participants suggested that climate movements must become long-term movements rather than collections of isolated campaigns, noting that the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement’s success was built on sustained alliances among churches, communities, civil society, and political leaders rather than on single-issue advocacy.

Ocean Health & Pacific Communities Health



THE HEALTH OF THE OCEAN REFLECTS
THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

Main Plenary Presentations and Discussion

One of the key points raised by the panellists was that ocean health is inseparable from food security, public health, cultural wellbeing, and livelihoods of Pacific peoples. Hence, ocean degradation was described not simply as an environmental issue but as an existential threat—a threat to our social, economic, and cultural resilience.

Alfred Ralifo from WWF Pacific highlighted the cumulative pressures facing marine ecosystems, including from climate change, pollution, sedimentation, overfishing, the proliferation of invasive species, habitat destruction, and ocean warming. He explained that ocean tipping points emerge from the combined effects of multiple pressures rather than any single threat.

Several speakers emphasised the importance of ocean literacy, arguing that stewardship, cultural identity, values, and a sense of belonging to the ocean begin with educating the current generation and posterity about the centrality of the ocean to our lives. Ocean literacy was described as extending beyond technical knowledge to include Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and custodianship.

Pradeep Singh spoke from the perspective of an international law scholar who now works in advocacy and supports governments in shaping laws governing the seas. He highlighted disconnects among negotiators in processes such as the BBNJ negotiations and expressed frustration with ocean-climate negotiations under the UNFCCC framework, noting that Pacific proposals are often sidelined. He concluded by reflecting on a museum quote linking the health of the oceans to that of people, emphasising the inseparable relationship between ocean and human wellbeing.

health by placing greater emphasis on food systems, customary economies, Indigenous stewardship and community wellbeing. Participants stressed that healthy oceans cannot be separated from healthy communities. Ocean degradation affects not only fisheries, food sovereignty, traditional livelihoods, and nutrition but also cultural identity.

Food security emerged as one of the defining issues of the symposium, with concerns about increasing dependence on imported food, declining agricultural knowledge, climate impacts on fisheries, and the weakening of customary food systems. But speakers also highlighted traditional food production, drought preparation, customary resource management, and intergenerational knowledge transfer as examples of Pacific resilience. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement was cited as an example of successful regional cooperation grounded in Pacific priorities.

The Indigenous Caucus repeatedly described the ocean as a living relative connected through genealogy, ancestry and reciprocity. Participants spoke of oceans not merely as ecosystems to be managed but as sacred relationships requiring care and guardianship. The concept of *Kastom Ikonomi* (Indigenous economic systems) was presented as a Pacific solution grounded in abundance, reciprocity, and responsibility rather than extraction and accumulation.

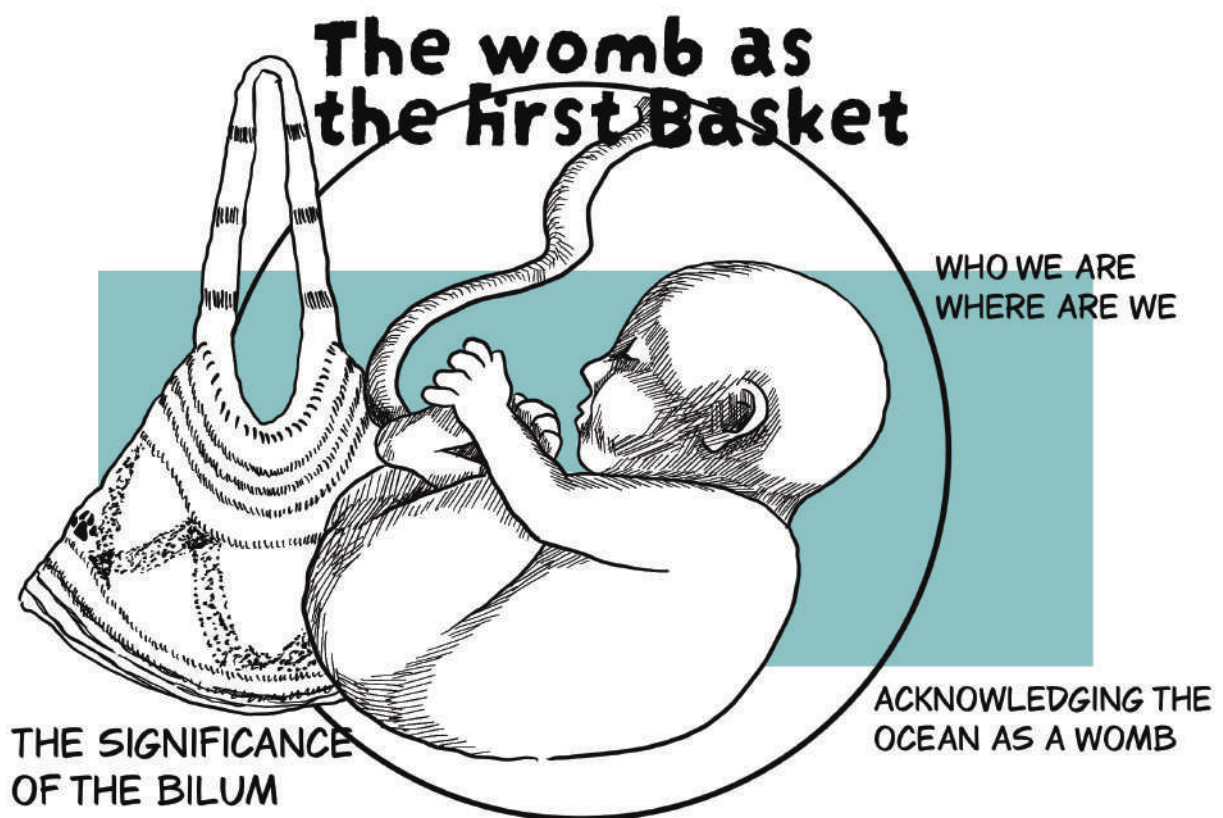
Traditional ecological knowledge—including navigation, fishing practices, seasonal cycles, language, oral histories and ceremonial practices—was described as both science and governance. Participants stressed that this knowledge should not simply complement modern science but help shape future ocean governance.

Day 2 significantly broadened discussions of ocean

Discussions increasingly framed ocean health in

terms of responsibility to future generations. Participants stressed that protecting the ocean also requires protecting cultural identity, language, customary institutions and relationships between people and place. Several speakers argued that preservation without transmission is insufficient; knowledge must be actively passed on to the younger generations through participation and lived experience.

Customary leaders from Kanaky described their efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledge, science, civil society and political leadership into a common approach to ocean governance. Ocean stewardship was presented as extending from mountain ridges to the deepest parts of the ocean, reflecting holistic Indigenous understandings of territory and responsibility.



Caucus Reflections

- Participants in the caucus suggested the need for stronger implementation of existing environmental laws and policies, saying that while Pacific countries possess strong legal frameworks, enforcement, monitoring, and access to justice remain significant challenges.
- Participants emphasised the key roles of community-based conservation, customary governance systems, and local stewardship practices in addressing ocean health issues, arguing that Pacific communities are already undertaking significant work in these areas and should be viewed as leaders rather than passive beneficiaries of capacity-building initiatives.
- The Indigenous Caucus contrasted Indigenous concepts of abundance with dominant Western models of scarcity and extraction, describing the ocean as a living relative and grandmother rather than a commodity. They suggested that decisions related to the ocean should therefore be guided by reciprocity, restraint, and responsibility to posterity rather than short-term economic gain.
- Participants expressed concern that Indigenous knowledge continues to be appropriated, repackaged and commercialised without recognition of its origins or custodians. They argued for stronger mechanisms to protect Indigenous intellectual sovereignty while creating spaces where Indigenous peoples can define and transmit knowledge on their own terms.
- Participants stressed the importance of intergenerational learning and called for the creation of dedicated Indigenous spaces where cultural knowledge, governance traditions and stewardship responsibilities could be renewed and strengthened.
- Participants emphasised the role of young people as future leaders and essential participants in present-day governance and, hence, key decision-makers in ocean policies. They argued that today's generation has a responsibility to prepare the next generation to inherit and strengthen Pacific movements.

Militarisation and Security



Main Plenary Presentations and Discussion

Participants expressed concern about increasing militarisation and securitisation of the Pacific region. Discussions highlighted growing geopolitical competition and the expansion of military agreements, infrastructure, and defence partnerships across the region.

Dr Claire Slatter warned that hyper-militarisation of the ocean is closely linked to resource competition and the erosion of multilateral governance. Discussions connected these trends to the AUKUS Treaty, strategic competition between major powers, namely the United States and China, and the framing of the Pacific space primarily through security lenses.

Maureen Penjueli highlighted how the global powers and their allies are re-imagining the Pacific Islands solely in militarised terms, viewing them as ‘island-chains’ that serve defence strategies.

This is resulting in the militarisation of Pacific lands, sea floors and skies. To challenge this, we need to adopt the ideas of Teresia Teiwa and make ‘Island’ a verb and ‘Island’ the world - as to be ‘islanded’ means that one must take care of people and place to live long and well. This also avoids the “stupor of continental fantasies” that are currently viewing the Pacific as a militarised space solely for the needs of the major powers.

Dr Marco de Jong said that, due to great-power rivalry, Pacific strategies are now being co-opted and watered down. He suggested that the Pacific urgently needs a new geopolitical assessment amid rising great-power rivalry and advances in military technology. He particularly emphasised the evolution of drone technology and its potential appeal to Pacific states for tasks such as fisheries management, but warned that they needed to embrace it with caution to avoid setting prece-

dents that normalise drone use in Pacific waters.

Dr Talei Mangioni looked at the history of NFIP, suggesting that the charter did not just focus on the health and environmental impacts of nuclear testing but took an intersectional approach that advocated the elimination of nuclear weapons and denuclearisation, a halt to the nuclear fuel cycle and demilitarisation. She also highlighted concerns regarding loopholes in the Treaty of Rarotonga and the implications of the AUKUS Treaty for peace and security in the Pacific.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls highlighted that although Pacific Island women have led peacebuilding efforts, they remain vastly underrepresented. She adds that women must be represented in gender-inclusive governance with equitable participation (up to 50%). We need to ensure an inclusive and intergenerational approach to addressing the root causes of conflict, militarisation, and security, as defined by the Pacific Island peoples who sustain this work every day.

Speakers made the crucial point that militarisation should be understood as an ocean governance issue rather than solely a defence issue. They suggested that the growing geopolitical competition, the AUKUS Treaty, the expansion of military infrastructure, surveillance systems, autonomous maritime technologies, and defence agreements were all reshaping the Pacific Ocean and Pacific communities.

Several speakers revisited the legacy of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement, describing it as a historic and intersectional movement that links nuclear abolition, decolonisation, environmental justice, self-determination, and genuine security. Rather than reinventing new frameworks, participants argued that many contemporary challenges could be

understood through this earlier Pacific vision.

The emergence of autonomous maritime systems, artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, drone technology and data governance was identified as a new frontier requiring proactive regional governance and coordinated response before these technologies become normalised.

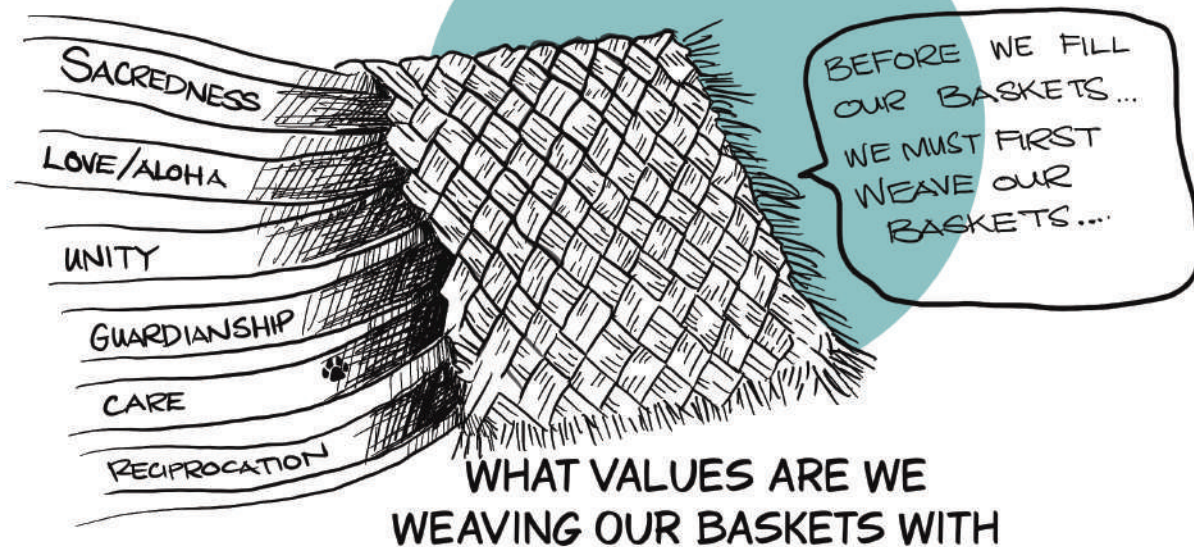
Day 3 significantly expanded discussions beyond identifying militarisation to developing strategic responses. Participants argued that Pacific security must move beyond military paradigms towards genuine human security grounded in peace, justice, Indigenous values and environmental stewardship. Discussions challenged dominant geopolitical narratives and proposed reclaiming concepts such as the Ocean of Peace through Pacific definitions rather than external strategic interests. There was also a growing emphasis on research priorities related to autonomous technologies, network warfare, sea drones, military emissions, artificial intelligence, and legal gaps in UNCLOS. Participants proposed proactive Pacific

engagement before these technologies become embedded within regional governance systems.

Day 4 shifted attention towards building durable peace movements. Participants proposed that the Ocean of Peace Declaration should be treated not merely as a political statement but as an evolving framework capable of connecting peacebuilding, climate action, gender justice and ocean governance. Discussions highlighted opportunities for greater civil society engagement within regional peace and security mechanisms and emphasised that peacebuilding should inform future work across all thematic areas.

Several speakers reflected on the historical role of churches in anti-nuclear, anti-colonial and peace movements. There were calls to renew these relationships, reconnect liberation theology with contemporary Pacific struggles, and build stronger partnerships between churches and civil society in advancing justice and ocean stewardship.

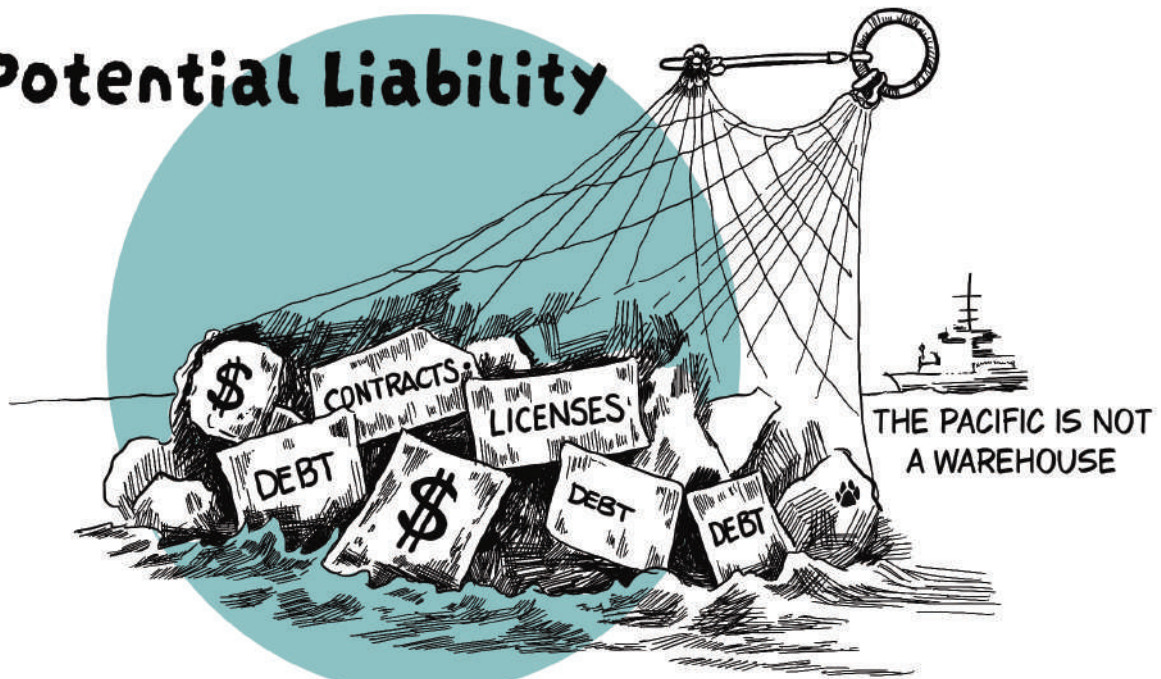
Our Basket offerings



Caucus Reflections

- Participants reflected on the continuing relevance of anti-nuclear and peace movements in shaping contemporary ocean governance.
- Participants highlighted the need to revisit Pacific definitions of security and move beyond externally imposed security narratives, emphasising the relationship between militarisation, climate change, extractivism, and colonial legacies.
- Participants argued that genuine security must encompass environmental protection, self-determination, and community wellbeing, consistently asking the question: Security for whom—and defined by whom?
- Participants called for reclaiming the language and narratives relating to security and rejecting narratives that prioritise strategic competition over climate resilience, human security and ocean stewardship. They also highlighted the need to centre Pacific voices, strengthen civil society coalitions, improve public access to information, and review existing laws governing security cooperation.
- Civil Society Groups made the vital point that work on oceans should focus on building movements rather than a series of isolated campaigns. They further stressed that work on militarisation, nuclear justice, climate, oceans, and extractivism should be treated as interconnected struggles that require coordinated advocacy.
- Participants called for strengthening alliances between researchers, lawyers, Indigenous leaders, parliamentarians and civil society organisations.
- Participants increasingly viewed security through the lens of solidarity and collective responsibility. Rather than focusing solely on geopolitical tensions, discussions explored how trust, relationships and movement-building can strengthen regional resilience.
- The idea of “movements of movements” emerged as a way of connecting existing campaigns without diminishing their individual identities.

Potential Liability



OUR OCEAN IS NOT AN ENDLESS
RESOURCE TO BE EXTRACTED

Blue Resourcing

Main Plenary Presentations and Discussion

Dame Meg Taylor, in her keynote speech, highlighted the underlying economic challenges faced by the Pacific Islands. Pointedly, she posed the question to participants as to whether the Pacific had “the architecture, the legal instruments, the policy frameworks—and above all, the economic independence—to sustain genuinely Pacific-led governance of our ocean?” While she believes the Pacific does, it is a vision that must be held on to.

Deep Sea Mining (DSM) emerged as the dominant issue in discussions on ocean resources. Participants expressed significant concern regarding the environmental, social, cultural, and economic implications of DSM and questioned whether current scientific knowledge is sufficient to support decision-making. Another important issue highlighted was that the relationality of Pacific peoples was being targeted and weakened, and as a result, Pacific solidarity was eroding on issues such as DSM.

Dr Slatter expressed great concern over the breakdown of international law and multilateralism, especially under the Trump administration. She noted that, in the new era of unilateralism, licenses could be issued to companies for deep-sea mining despite established systems of international governance and international law. She stressed the importance of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and its member states maintaining clarity about appropriate governance processes. Deep-sea mining, she warned, would cause irreparable damage.

Discussions highlighted increasing pressure around critical minerals, supply chains, and resource extraction linked to global energy transitions. Participants warned against narratives that present extraction as inevitable or morally necessary without adequately addressing environmental and social risks.

A very important point raised in the Academics and Lawyers Caucus was the fact that academics and lawyers themselves can be “perpetrators of extractivism.” Law firms have increasingly entered the arena through supposedly environmental and green work, providing them with pathways to expand into other areas and activities.

Human Rights lawyer Kavita Naidu noted the limited national legislation on oceans and maritime issues, saying that whatever exists remains untested. She also noted that Pacific legislation on ocean-based governance was insufficient, saying environmental rights were often treated primarily as land issues. She questioned how the ICJ Advisory Opinion (IC-JAO) could be implemented at the national level.

Maureen Penjueli noted that while there are strong environmental laws in place, there may not be a corresponding Climate Change Act that adequately embeds oceans. She also highlighted a reporting gap within NCDs. Policy processes in climate change spaces often exclude ocean issues. There has been no domestic application of the ICJ Advisory Opinion, and fragmentation persists between the SPREP Convention and the Office of the Ocean Commissioner, with no clearly interconnected nexus between them.

Day 2 greatly expanded this discussion beyond deep-sea mining to encompass broader questions of economic justice and Pacific development. Participants questioned dominant blue economy narratives, arguing that they often disguise new forms of extraction under the guise of sustainability, stewardship, or a climate transition. Speakers warned against “blue-washing” and “green-washing,” and challenged the assumption that economic growth necessarily requires intensified resource extraction.

Economic self-determination emerged as a central theme. Discussions explored economic nationalism, sovereign wealth funds, regional financing mechanisms, food sovereignty, and local value addition as alternatives to externally driven development models. The Pacific Resilience Facility was highlighted as an innovative regional financing initiative deserving further support.

Participants repeatedly emphasised the view that the ocean's value to Pacific peoples cannot be reduced to monetary terms. Rather, the ocean represents identity, culture, livelihoods, spirituality, food security and the welfare and wellbeing of future generations. Gov. Gary Juffa sounded the warning that our colonisers shouldn't return as our investors, and he challenged the concept of "Ocean Stewardship," which he saw as a guise for "extraction."

Chien Yen Goh, Legal Advisor and Researcher with Third World Network, highlighted the economic vulnerabilities of the Pacific Island Countries and how this can lend itself to donor dependence and political interference, and suggested that economic independence will be helped through clear development plans, reduced import dependence (especially fuel), and grant financing instead of new debt. India Logan-Riley (Tai Tawhito, Tai Tipua) suggested the Pacific is battling the Western appetite for overdevelopment and posed two intriguing questions: "What does it mean to exchange our oceans as commodities and what are our governments doing to reinvigorate our customary economies?"

Day 3 shifted discussions from critique towards finding alternative economic pathways. Participants argued that Pacific development should move beyond GDP-focused models and instead prioritise community wellbeing, the welfare of Indigenous communities, cultural continuity, ecological integrity, and support for Indigenous economies. Participants repeatedly called for Pacific leaders and peoples to challenge dominant macroeconomic assumptions, strengthen

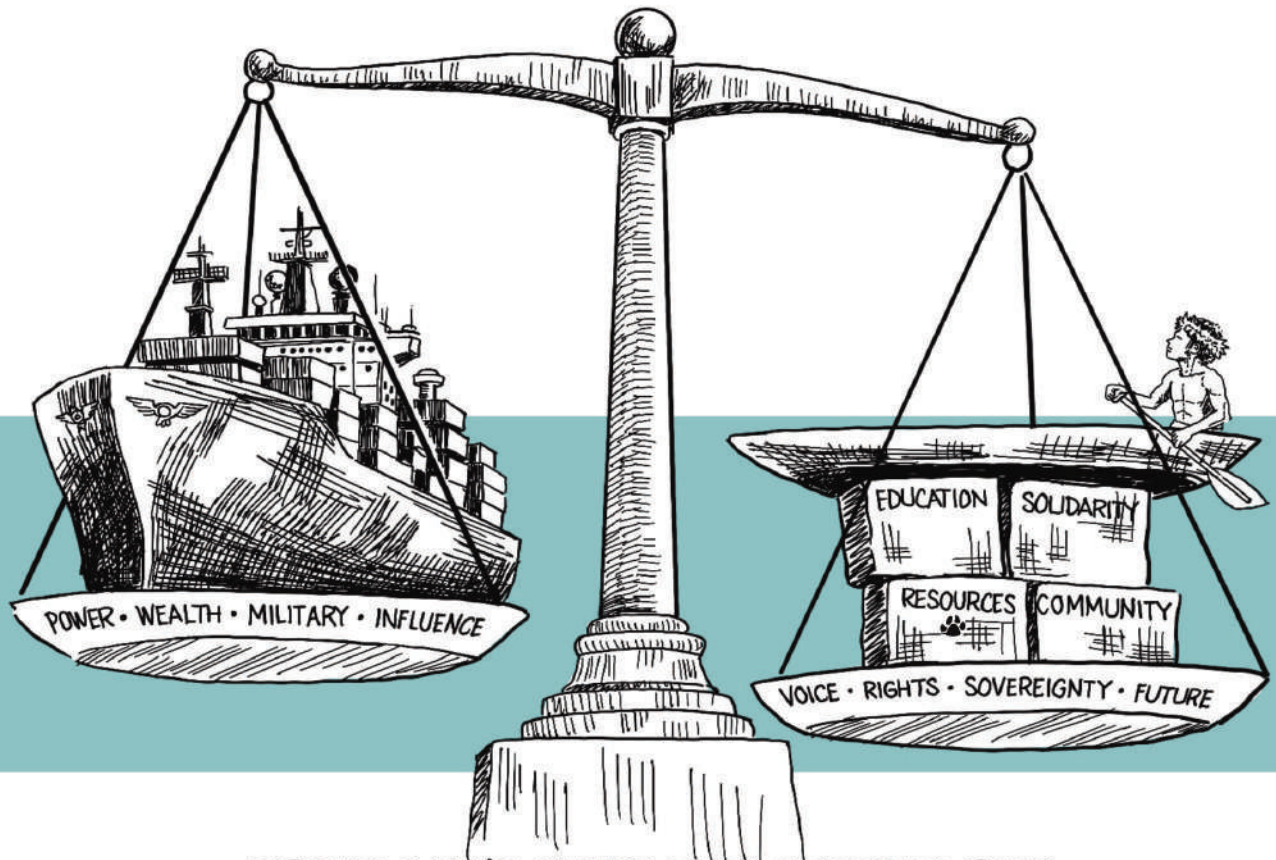
Pacific political economy research, and expose "blue-washing", "law-washing" and corporate narratives that legitimise new extractive industries.

The issue of Deep Sea Mining remained central, but discussions also focused on strengthening legal strategies, scientific evidence, regional coordination and public communication ahead of the July ISA meeting. Participants also highlighted the need to connect DSM debates with broader questions of fossil fuel transitions, critical minerals and economic justice. Hon. Ralph Regenvanu suggested it was more important to shift the conversations from simplistic pro- versus anti-DSM positions towards addressing the scientific uncertainties surrounding the issue and protecting fisheries and marine ecosystems.

Day 4 introduced conversations surrounding the politics of development finance. Participants examined the declining levels of Official Development Assistance, the concentration of funding in externally determined priorities, and the limited share of resources reaching Pacific communities and locally led organisations. Discussions highlighted that restricted funding often fails to support long-term movement-building, personnel retention and organisational sustainability.

Several speakers made the vital point that conversations surrounding financing should move beyond the volume of funding to examining its origins, ethics, conditions and distribution. Participants stressed that questions of who controls resources, who benefits, and whose priorities shape investment decisions are central to Pacific autonomy and self-determination. The Pacific Feminist Fund was presented as an example of an alternative funding model designed to channel resources directly to Pacific-led organisations while encouraging longer-term, flexible and movement-centred support.

Ocean Stewardship



IF WE CAN'T MAKE THE STRONG FAIR,
THEN WE MUST MAKE THE WEAK STRONG

Caucus Reflections

- Plenary discussions focused on Deep Sea Mining, with participants reflecting on developments across the region and sharing concerns about the potential environmental, social, and economic implications of mining activities on the ocean floor.
- Hon. Ralph Regenvanu spoke about recent regional developments and the need to better understand the implications of DSM, particularly for fisheries and marine ecosystems that Pacific communities depend upon.
- Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that legislative and policy decisions are informed by independent scientific evidence.
- Drawing on experiences from Papua New Guinea, Hon. Juffa reflected on earlier attempts to advance DSM projects and the resistance that emerged from parliamentarians, communities, and civil society organisations. He noted that uncertainty surrounding the environmental impacts remains a major concern and emphasised the role that civil society continues to play in informing public understanding and holding decision-makers accountable.
- Participants observed that while mining proposals may change names or forms over time, concerns regarding their long-term impacts remain unresolved.
- Sir Iakoba Italeli reminded the group that for many Pacific Island countries, the ocean and seabed are not simply resources to be exploited but are deeply connected to culture, identity, heritage, and survival. Several speakers echoed this sentiment and called for decision-making processes that recognise these broader cultural and ecological values.
- Participants expressed strong caution regarding the DSM and called for greater investment in independent research before decisions with potentially irreversible consequences are made.
- Participants stressed that Pacific communities already possess clear positions on many resource governance issues and that civil society should avoid reducing these positions to technical regulatory debates. They further highlighted the need to support community self-determination and local decision-making.
- Participants expressed concern about economic dependence, donor influence, and external pressures that can shape resource governance decisions, affirming the importance of maintaining Pacific agency in decisions relating to ocean resources.
- The Indigenous Caucus reframed economic discussions around Indigenous “ikonomis”, emphasising abundance, reciprocity and collective wellbeing rather than extraction and accumulation. Participants discussed the need to strengthen customary economies, protect traditional knowledge, encourage generational thinking, and build Pacific unity amid increasing external pressures
- Participants agreed that Pacific countries must strengthen their own economic narratives rather than accepting externally defined concepts of prosperity

- Participants advocated for stronger political economy research, greater understanding of financial systems, support for community finance, and more effective communication of economic issues—including national budgets and debt—to grassroots communities.
- Participants reflected on broader questions of resource justice, ecological debt and transparency. There was discussion of the ethical dilemmas associated with funding sources, the need for greater openness within civil society, and opportunities to develop Pacific-controlled financing mechanisms to support long-term regional collaboration.
- Participants also highlighted the importance of recognising unpaid labour, care work and community leadership, arguing that these forms of contribution are often overlooked within conventional funding systems despite being essential to Pacific movements.
- Participants also examined the relationship between civil society and political leadership, reflecting on earlier periods in Pacific history, particularly during regional anti-nuclear movements, when governments and civil society organisations often worked closely together to pursue shared goals. Questions were raised about what enabled those partnerships and what lessons might be applied today.
- Hon. Ralph Regenvanu observed that relationships between governments and civil society appeared stronger during earlier periods and suggested that there may be valuable lessons to be learned from how those alliances were formed and sustained.
- Participants discussed the possibility of strengthening connections among parliamentarians, traditional leaders, elders, and community representatives, exploring how such alliances could strengthen regional advocacy and provide greater political support for ocean justice initiatives.



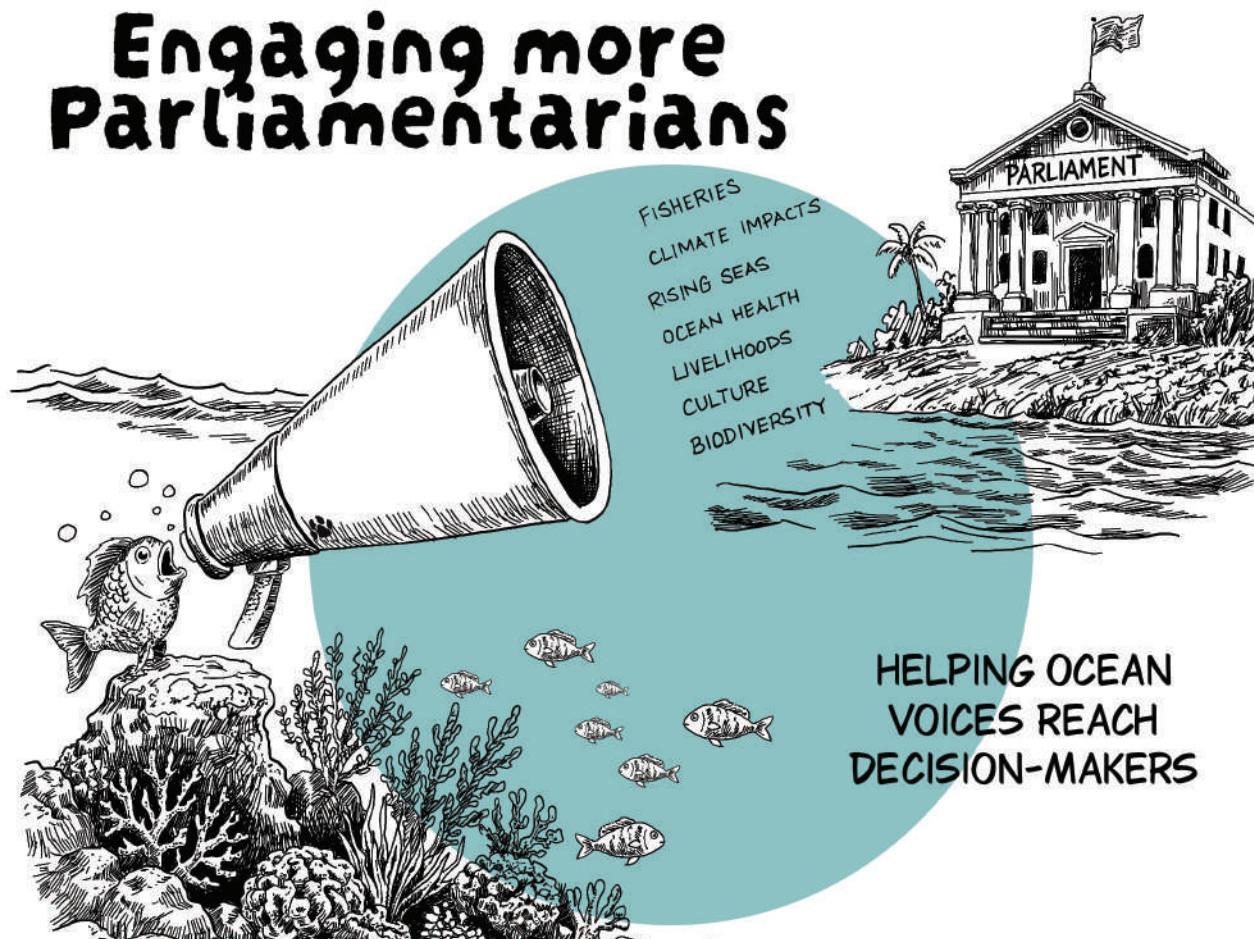
Convening Outcomes & Recommendations

The following are some outcomes and recommendations from the discussions over the four days:

Policy and Governance

- Advance a Pacific Fossil Fuel Free Extraction Zone.
- Strengthen precautionary approaches to DSM.
- Reclaim, safeguard and future-proof the Ocean of Peace as a Pacific-led governance concept.
- Strengthen and expand the Pacific Parliamentarians Alliance on Deep Sea Mining (PPADSM) to the Pacific Ocean Leaders Alliance, as a broader platform and unified voice for Pacific regional parliamentarians and leaders to engage on ocean issues and to provide greater opportunities for the involvement of other leaders.

Engaging more Parliamentarians



Research and Knowledge

- Support independent Pacific scientific research.
- Decolonise research methodologies.
- Integrate Indigenous Knowledge with science.
- Improve communication of research to communities.
- Conduct research on UNCLOS and peaceful purposes reservations to close dual-use and verify end-use purposes.
- Research the relevance of ICJ and ITLOS advisory opinions for the oceans and the operationalisation of the ocean of peace.
- Conduct research into international human rights law on network warfare, sea drones, and the responsible use of technology.
- Research military emissions as the number one polluter.
- Operationalise the Treaty of Rarotonga, revisit NFIP principles to do this on nuclear abolition and self-determination, close “stationing” loopholes that the AUKUS Treaty has with B-52 bombers and submarines.
- Contribute Pacific perspectives to the AUKUS Public Inquiry.
- Foster solidarity and good relations with sovereignty movements in Australia, including occupied communities on the front lines of militarisation.
- Give substance to arguments against an empty ocean.
- Contribute Pacific Islanders to the Pine Gap Sacred Land Back convening in July to build solidarity.

What is the science saying

REPORT CARD

NAME: HUMANITY

GRADING SYSTEM
A 90-100
B 80-89
C 70-79
D 60-69
F 59-0

LISTENING TO SCIENCE	D
LOOKING BEYOND ELECTIONS	F
OCEAN PROTECTION	F
SHARING RESOURCES	F
THINKING 7 GENERATIONS	F
KEEPING CLIMATE PROMISES	F

SEE ME AFTER CLASS!!



MORE IMPORTANTLY, ARE WE ALSO LISTENING TO WHAT OUR TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE TELLS US?

What can CSOs carry



- CONNECTING GROUPS
- NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS
- SUPPORT THE ICJ
- COLLECTIVE FUNDING

Regional Cooperation

- Establish stronger mechanisms for CSO information and briefing sharing.
- Create regional databases and strategic coordination platforms on thematic issues.
- Build enduring alliances across governments, CSOs, academia and Indigenous networks.
- Community Action
- Support grassroots mobilisation.
- Strengthen media engagement and journalist training.
- Establish an Indigenous caucus that is built on the values of mutual respect and representative of the Pacific in its entirety.
- Increase participation of youth, women, persons with disabilities and SOGIESC communities.
- Defend non-negotiables such as opposition to DSM and nuclear weapons.
- Sustainable Resourcing
- Increase flexible funding for Pacific-led organisations.
- Improve transparency and accountability in development finance.
- Develop Pacific-controlled financing mechanisms.
- Recognise unpaid care work and movement-building as essential investments.
- Ensure resources reach grassroots communities and local leadership.

Commitments for Future Engagement

- 8th Pacific Media Summit – Fiji, September 21-25 2026.
- Mei ‘Avaiki Mai, Cook Islands, 30 March - 2 April 2027.
- 2nd International Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels – Tuvalu, last week of April 2027.
- Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation - Kanaky, 7-11 September 2027.
- Triennial Conference of Pacific Women – PNG, 2027.
- State of the Ocean Convening – Vanuatu, 2028.
- Pacific Islands Arts Festival – Kanaky, 2028.

Key Moments









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Every contribution, whether a word shared, a story told, a connection made or an idea offered, has helped strengthen this collective record. These Proceedings are a reflection of a shared commitment to our ocean and of the many voices that continue to shape the conversation about its future.

We acknowledge that the knowledge contained within these pages does not belong to any one person or institution. It is part of a much larger and living body of knowledge, grounded in the histories, cultures, relationships and experiences of Pacific peoples and their deep connection to the ocean.

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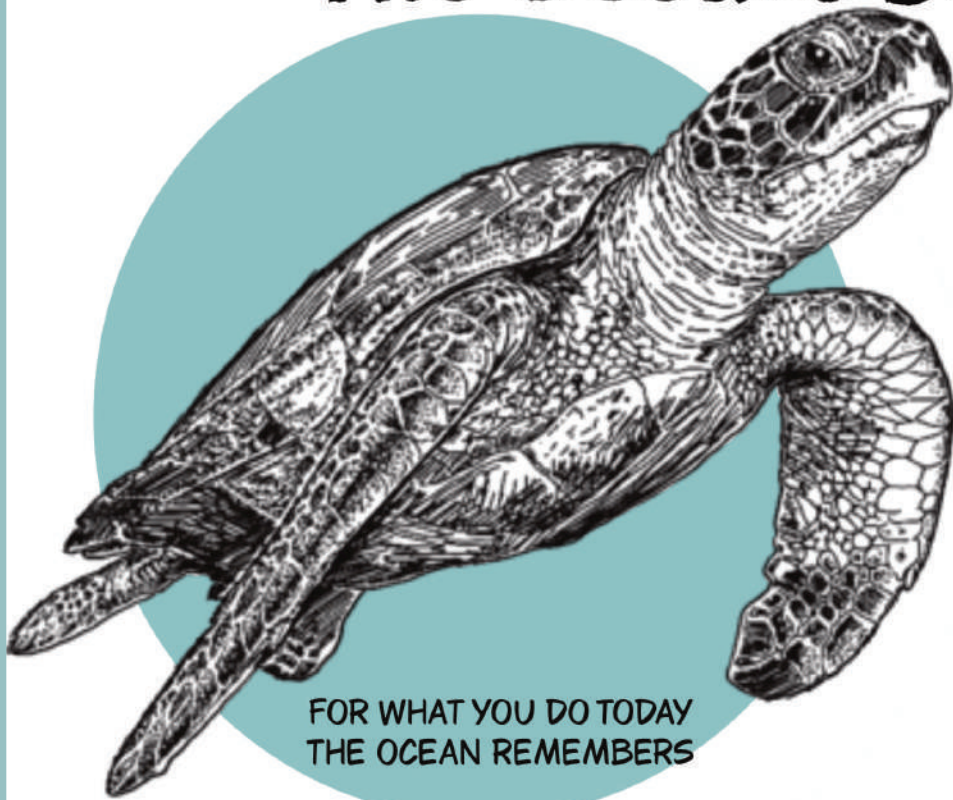
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ONE OCEAN. ONE LIVING
BODY. ONE SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY.



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