

Country Statement – Australia

- Good afternoon, bula vinaka.
- Thank you, Chairs – Ministers Rayalu and Ravu – for the opportunity for Australia to deliver a statement
 - I am representing our Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon. Murray Watt, who offers his apology for not being here today due to parliamentary sitting commitments.
- On Minister Watt’s behalf, I extend my warmest regards to all Pacific Ministers and partners.
- I would first like to acknowledge the First Nations peoples of the land we are meeting on and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples present today. Australia recognises that First Nations peoples have a special connection and relationship with their natural environment, and we acknowledge their wisdom and expertise and caring for their country, both land and sea.
- I would also like to acknowledge our colleagues from Vanuatu who have been unable to attend this meeting. We stand with the people of Vanuatu and New Zealand as they respond to the devastating impact of recent weather events.

Pacific Engagement

- As a member of the Pacific family, Australia is committed to working with the Pacific to achieve our shared aspirations and address our shared challenges.
- We enjoy extensive cooperation and collaboration with the Pacific on a range of technical and policy agricultural matters, and continue to grow and evolve together, delivering practical outcomes.
- We are here to listen and learn how we can work with you to enhance food and nutritional security of the Pacific region. We want to strengthen our cooperation on the ground
 - but also, to work together so that we can better reflect the needs and priorities of our region in important multilateral forums, including at the FAO in Rome.

Collaboration in the Agriculture and Forestry sectors

- Our collaborative efforts contribute to our mutual commitment to strong agricultural sectors - through biosecurity, sustainability and climate adaptation and resilience, production, market access and trade.
- Our region faces many challenges – the most pressing of these is the existential threat of climate change
 - The biggest impacts are felt by the most vulnerable in our communities – particularly women and girls, and people living with a disability
 - Bringing together climate information in useful and timely way that drives decision-making is a key part of building resilience.
- We recognise the important role that women and youth play to ensure resilience in agriculture and forestry
 - And we are proud to be supporting Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community’s work to ensure women’s role in organic agriculture are recognised in line with the Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration.
- Enabling and supporting regional collaboration is also of critical importance for us. This includes:
 - Partnering on agricultural research and capacity building, particularly through partnerships with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research;
 - Maintaining healthy soils and preserving the unique genetic diversity of key crops through our support for the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees; and
 - Managing biosecurity threats, specifically our commitment to support biosecurity preparedness and response across the Pacific
 - We have developed a new Pacific Biosecurity Strategy designed to address pest and disease risks
 - Australia is keen to consult with our Pacific family on this strategy to better respond to threats to agriculture, food systems and help provide market access opportunities.
- We remain committed to One Health - the interface between human, animal and environmental health
 - This underpins a strong Pacific agricultural sector and open up trade opportunities

- We have heard today about the role that Pacific food systems play in not only feeding the Pacific, but also creating the foundation for a strong and resilient Pacific agricultural future.
 - We will continue to work with Pacific Governments, NGOs, communities and farmers to strengthen the Pacific food system so that it can lead to improved livelihoods, food and nutrition security and income earning opportunities.
- We also highly value our partnerships on this work with New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom and France and other partners in the region, such as SPC and FAO.
- We believe it is important that the Land and Resources Division of the SPC is given the resources needed to support the vital agenda we have discussed this week on issues such as soils, plant protection, animal health and organic agriculture.
- I am pleased to have had the opportunity today to hear from leaders about how we can tackle the climate crises, strengthen our economies post-pandemic, and achieve our shared interests for a peaceful and secure region.
- Thank you – vinaka vaka levu