



Honorable Minister Mr Ruateki Tekaiara

Speech on the occasion of Ministers Pacific Agriculture Meeting

Honorable Ministers

FAO Deputy Director General Mr Laurent Thomas

SPC Director General

Senior Officials

Development Partners

Distinguished guest

Ladies and gentlemen

Kamna Bane Ni Mauri – May we all be blessed with good health.

I wish to begin by acknowledging FAO and SPC for organizing the meeting that bring us together as agriculture and forestry families. Let me also thank the Government of Fiji for the kind welcome and warm courtesies extended to my delegation and I since our arrival in your beautiful country: Ko bati n rabwa and *Vinaka vakalevu Fiji*.

My messages throughout the course of this Pacific week of agriculture and forestry have been on the same theme. That we need to come together across the Pacific to collaborate on ways forward and we need action on the ground to transform the agriculture sector in Kiribati.

We are not on the same level of playing field in this part of our region in terms of agriculture and for us Kiribati agriculture is not our comparative advantage. We are a large ocean state, and the ocean is the backbone of our economy. Being an atoll nation, agriculture is challenging, and I thank the Fiji Honorable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry for clearly stressing this at his opening address. Climate change is exacerbating the challenges in terms of saltwater intrusion, water scarcity, coastal erosions to name a few. Interventions that worked previously may not work now, and we need to continue to evolve and adapt our approaches to this new and changing environment.

Despite the challenges posed against us we are still committed to scale up and boost agriculture in order to transform this sector. We live and experience the issues on a daily basis and are well versed with the solution options that best fit our very own local and environment context. The whole of island approach is critical to bring our people and communities together and mobilized to plant and grow our food crops. Let

us begin within our own families, within our communities, our villages, our islands and our nations.

Ensuring that our whole of island approach delivers on our transformation agenda, financing and technical support is key to make a difference. As a small island nation with limited capacity and resources we continue to call to those with resources, expertise, research advantage and technologies. The financing is to invest in the tools and equipment, proven techniques and methodologies, technical expertise and water systems at every community and island level – we must reach all the islands with this support. These are critical priorities and need to be suitable to our context, well-coordinated and implemented in collaboration with our communities, to be effective.

Honorable Chair, those are our core priorities and I look forward to our continue partnership with our development partners and let us work together to broaden and deepen our cooperation in addressing our development challenges as vulnerable small island nation.

With these words, allow me distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen to share with you all our traditional blessing of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa.

Kam rabwa.

