

8th Regional Meeting of the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services
Partner Statement from the United States of America
Thursday, 9 March

- Greetings. Thank you for inviting us to this important gathering. It is our pleasure to join you all today. I would especially like to thank our SPC and FAO colleagues for organizing this Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (PHOAFS). We also appreciate the work of the Fiji government in hosting Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry in Nadi this week. Our Ambassador to Fiji had the pleasure of joining the opening ceremonies on Monday, and my colleagues and I have enjoyed participating in the many side events this week.
- The United States is a proud Pacific country and will continue to be an active, engaged partner in the region and a friend to all your countries.
- As a founding member of SPC, the United States' strong support for the organization has endured since 1947 and will continue to do so, as demonstrated by our continued investments in the organization, including from State, USAID, and NOAA, among others.
- The United States supports SPC's strategic aims to promote sustainable development in the Pacific and considers SPC to be the premier scientific and technical organization in the Pacific region.
- The United States is increasing its engagement with the Pacific Islands and Pacific regional organizations, including the SPC, to new levels.
- Over the past year, the United States has opened a new Embassy in the Solomon Islands, and at the Pacific Islands Forum last year, Vice-President Harris announced that the U.S. will launch the process to establish two other new embassies in the region, in Tonga and Kiribati. We also announced the first ever United States Envoy to the PIF and have begun to return Peace Corps volunteers to the region. In addition, USAID will re-establish a regional mission in Fiji and elevate our engagement in Papua New Guinea to a Country Representative Office, both by September of this year.
- The United States continues to strengthen our engagement with the Pacific Islands. Notably, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman led a high-level interagency delegation to the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders, and U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken hosted Pacific Islands leaders in New York at the U.N. General Assembly to discuss the new Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative, or PBP. The PBP aims to work together with the PIF and other CROPS including SPC to drive resources to the Pacific Islands region in alignment with your national and regional goals and priorities, including the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent.
- The United States was also proud to host the historic U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit in September where we announced numerous ambitious and important initiatives to meet priorities identified by Pacific Island countries, including over \$810 million in additional expanded programs. These initiatives seek to improve the lives and wellbeing of all Pacific Islanders by expanding diplomatic engagement; combatting the climate crisis; launching a new Trade and Investment Dialogue; providing development assistance; enhancing maritime security; expanding educational opportunities; and enhancing security, health, and digital capacity.
- The United States' commitment to the Pacific Islands and to working with the SPC to make progress on shared regional priorities is stronger than ever. We look forward to working with fellow SPC members to build a unified, safe, just, equitable and resilient Blue Pacific.

- In regard to agriculture and invasive species issues, the United States would like to congratulate the Republic of Palau, the East West Center, SPC and their partners for successfully hosting the First Pacific Ecological Security Conference (PESC) in Palau last October. The U.S. State Department is glad to have provided funding and on-the-ground logistical support for this important and precedent-setting Conference. The first PESC welcomed Ministers and invasive species leadership and technical experts from fifteen Pacific Island Countries and Territories to accomplish two objectives:
 - First, to highlight the critical importance of preventing, controlling, and eradicating invasive species to enhance and protect PICT climate resilience, food security, livelihoods, and cultural resources, as well as to protect biodiversity;
 - And second, to fine-tune Pacific-wide Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) that address three of the most pressing invasive species issues facing the PICTs—the coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB), invasive ants, and generally enhancing biocontrol options targeting priority invasive species.
- We also note the recent Communiqué of the 25th Micronesian Island Forum in February highlighted these issues, including:
 - The critical importance of invasive species work (prevention, control, eradication, research) to building and maintaining climate resilience of our ecosystems, food security, livelihoods, cultures, and biodiversity, and;
 - The need to integrate invasive species efforts in Micronesia undertaken both by national governments and U.S. Departments and agencies in the compact states into the broader Pacific basin efforts by collaborating with Australia, New Zealand and others on programmatic and research efforts.
 - The necessity of implementing the outcomes of the first PESC, including its three Strategic Action Plans and planning the next PESC.
- Additionally, the US is interested in engaging even more actively with SPC, SPREP, Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific partners to explore options to address the recommendations of the PESC, including greater research and programmatic collaboration.
- Turning now to Forestry issues, the United States would like to highlight how the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and USAID are supporting Pacific Island countries in areas such as mangrove and forest restoration and management, developing protocols to assess carbon stocks and GHG emissions and reporting and disaster response management.
- The Pacific Island Forest Restoration Initiative (PIFRI), funded by the U.S. Department of State and implemented by the U.S. Forest Service, has awarded 21 grants in 7 Pacific Island Countries for restoring and conserving mangroves and forests and increasing resilience of local communities. USFS experts provide technical assistance to partner organizations implementing the projects. Additional support through trainings and workshops enable information and knowledge exchange between USFS experts and PIFRI partner organizations.
- USFS International Programs also provides financial and technical assistance to its partner organization NatureFiji-MareqetiViti through the Improving and Strengthening Leadership for Nature-based Development (ISLAND) program, which focuses on community-based forest management, mangrove and forest restoration, biodiversity protection, and support for alternative livelihoods. Through tuition and internship support, the ISLAND program also aims to generate future leadership in the environmental sector.

- The State Department-funded Climate Fellows program has placed two USFS experts within host agencies of the Governments of Fiji and Palau to provide technical assistance in areas of forest inventory assessment, GHG emission assessment and reporting, and mangrove monitoring and conservation. Fiji Climate Fellow Dr. Randy Hamilton provides technical assistance to the REDD+ Unit at the Ministry of Forestry and also is developing initiatives to improve land-use monitoring and forest inventory methodologies. Dr. Richard MacKenzie is the Blue Carbon Climate Fellow in Palau focusing on mangrove restoration and monitoring and initiating a Blue Carbon Knowledge Exchange Network that will allow the collection and sharing of Blue Carbon related data in the Pacific Region.
- As part of the joint Disaster Assistance Support program, USFS and USAID are providing support to SPC's Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA), including by conducting Emergency Operation Center (EOC) simulation exercises and supporting the development of Standard Operating Protocols.
- The USFS and U.S. Department of State are evaluating options to provide technical assistance to enhance the capacity of relevant government bodies to monitor compliance and enforce regulations in the field operations of logging projects, including the use of emerging technologies and information management systems. This would also provide a platform for supporting professional exchanges of forestry and environmental professionals between the US and the Solomon Islands, which will help foster partnerships and collaboration between and among government entities and other stakeholders.
- Thank you again for your attention. We commend the important work undertaken by Pacific Islands governments and regional Pacific bodies, including SPC, in the agriculture and forestry sectors.