

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) – CRGA Observer Statement

- The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat welcomes the opportunity to participate in CRGA50.
- The Pacific Community plays a critical role in providing scientific and technical advice and supporting the sustainable development of our Blue Pacific, based on our Leaders' vision and priorities.
- I wish to particularly acknowledge SPC's leading role on two major priorities for our region - combatting COVID-19 and securing the outer limits of our Blue Pacific.

COVID-19

- Forum Leaders have recognised COVID-19 as a major crisis for our region. The pandemic has exposed systemic vulnerabilities and wiped out decades of hard-earned development gains, with a projected 6.1% economic decline across the region. The effects will be felt for months and years to come.
- The pandemic also highlighted national and regional political leadership and our belief in science when we quickly came together to confront COVID-19, including establishing the *Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19* and working to assess and respond to the devastating socio-economic impacts.
- As our lead technical agency on health, SPC has played a critical role in providing public health advice; supporting the establishment of the PHP-C; and supporting the development of common regional protocols. SPC has also focused attention on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups; strengthened food systems; driven a focus on digital transformation and provided advice on building back better, in a climate smart way.
- The Secretariat continues to work closely with the Pacific Community to progress the work on the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on the Pacific region. A key tasking by Forum Economic Ministers in 2020, this work will underpin and inform the region's recovery in the long term.

Securing maritime boundaries

- Excellencies and officials of the CRGA, to secure the future of our Blue Pacific region, we must secure our maritime boundaries, as provided for under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention.

- As called for by Forum Leaders, this involves concluding the outstanding 13 of our 48 shared boundaries and ensuring our maritime zones cannot be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change.
- I would like to acknowledge SPC's instrumental role in providing technical and legal advice to Members on maritime boundaries and delineation of maritime zones. I am of the firm belief that our identity secures our collective home; this is a defining issue for our region.

2050 Strategy and regional architecture review

- Excellencies and officials of the CRGA, in tackling our current development challenges, we must also lift our gaze to defining and driving the future we want for our region.
- In 2019, Forum Leaders called for the development of a *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.
- As its core, the 2050 Strategy is about bringing the Blue Pacific together to develop a long-term vision for our region and setting out how we will work together to achieve that vision.
- SPC has played, and continues to play, a critical role in informing the development of the 2050 Strategy – in terms of science, innovation and sustainable and human development. In particular, the support of SPC has been instrumental in the data analysis of the outcomes of the various national consultations that have been pursued by the Member States. I thank SPC for supporting the development of the 2050 Strategy to date including direct support, facilitating New Caledonia's national consultations, and through the CROP Taskforce.
- As important as setting our 2050 Strategy, is the Forum Leaders' decision to review the regional architecture to deliver on it. It is an opportunity to strengthen our regional architecture to ensure that it is aligned to coherently respond to our collective priorities in an efficient and effective manner.
- I encourage all our Member countries and CROP agencies to seize this opportunity and to think and act boldly - to ensure we collectively build a regional architecture that is coherent, responsive and delivers with a clear, collective mandate.

Closing Remarks

- In closing, I wish to also acknowledge SPC's support for the Forum Referendum Observer Mission to New Caledonia's independence plebiscite last month.
- Let me once again extend my thanks to Director-General, Dr. Stuart Minchin, and all SPC staff for their important work to advance the prosperity, inclusion, harmony and security of the Pacific region.