

Responding Remarks

Mr David Sheppard (Director General, SPREP)

Ambassador Jackson, Federated States of Micronesia, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Environment Fiji, Mr Samuela Namosimalua (and congratulations on your seminar Sir – for chairing at one of the sessions at the 9th Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas), distinguished representatives of PIC's, heads of organizations, private sector, civil societies, NGO's (I think the organizers have done a good job in bringing a whole range of groups together), Director SPC, SOPAC, Professor Mike Petterson, delegates to the workshop, ladies and gentlemen – Good morning, Yadra, Bonjour and Talofa.

This issue of deep sea minerals is of great importance, I have been commonly asked and am particularly stunned by my response – so I'm looking this week for guidance, answers and information. At the outset I would like to thank the government of Fiji for hosting this important workshop and particularly to thank SPC SOPAC for a very close and effective collaboration throughout the planning.

Bit of background, SPREP is the regional organisation for the environment within the context of sustainable development. We've been in the region for 40 years, 20 years as an independent inter-governmental organisation. Our focus areas are: (1) Biodiversity and ecosystem management, (2) Waste management and pollution, (3) Environmental management and governance, and (4) Climate Change. We operate under the SPREP Convention and international treaty which came into force in 1993. If any of you would have been in SPREP in 20th of June, 2013, you would have participated in a fantastic 20th birthday party. SPREP as well as the SPREP Convention is also the repository for other 2 Conventions in the region; (1) the Waigani Convention which in fact is a mirror to another convention called the Basel Convention which deals with the transboundary movement of waste. The (2) Convention is the Noumea Convention which relates to the protection and management of Pacific marine resources. The Noumea Convention, Article 8 which relates to pollution of seabed activities and Article 16 which relates to environment impact assessments, are particularly relevant as we look for frameworks for guidance. The Noumea Convention does provide some broad guidance in these 2 Articles.

SPREP is very pleased that our change management process implemented over the last few years involved support to all our PIC's and territories. We will continue to accelerate this support. One of the key notes of change management is seeking for partnership with others (individuals, agencies and organisations) that have similar objectives, in particular partnerships with our sister CROP agencies, therefore we are delighted to partner with SPC, SOPAC on this workshop. We talk a lot about partnership but what we see this week is partnership in action.

We had just come back from a Biodiversity Conference last week, largest conference of its time in the Pacific, more than 800 people participated. We were honoured to have the key note addresses from the Hon President and the Hon Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji. Both key notes addresses that a healthy and well managed environment is essential for sustainable development and the livelihoods of people in our region. They also emphasized that local communities have to be at the centre of conservation efforts in our region and that activities are to be with and through local communities. Last week conference also heard that terrestrial and marine biodiversity of the Pacific is unique at a regional and global scale, for example, 7% of the planet's biodiversity is in Papua New Guinea and the land mass of PNG only occupies 0.6% of the total land area of the globe. This biodiversity is particularly at risk in our region from issues such as invasive species, threats of inappropriate resource use, our extinction rates particularly for some groups of species (birds, reptiles, fresh water fish, land snails) is amongst the highest

in the world. In our region we hear a lot about change in climate, non-communicable diseases, obesity, blood pressure etc. The loss of biodiversity is also a crisis for our region with long lasting consequences for sustainable development and the livelihoods of our region. Climate change is a major challenge for the region and leaders have consistently raised this as an issue. This has been emphasized in all the Pacific Forums I have been too, the President of Kiribati noted that Climate Change is a matter of national security.

Last week conference there was also a lot of discussion on deep seabed mining and concerns were expressed on the potential environmental impacts of this activity. I think it is very important for this week that we hear and listen to these concerns during the course of the workshop. There are many uncertainties and unknowns in the deep ocean, we must act with the precautionary approach and ensure that we have the policies and systems in forefront to safeguard our environment, people and marine resources. The people of the Pacific islands continue to be fundamentally dependent on natural resources that occur in great abundance, on-land and in the coastal and marine waters of the Pacific Ocean. SPREP recognises that it is more important than ever to work with Pacific island countries to manage this wealth of resources for the future, taking an integrated approach to allow multiple resource use in a sustainable way. Deep resource minerals provide an opportunity and challenge that needs a collaborative and innovative Pacific approach, just as the “Parties to the Nauru Agreement” (PINA) have progressed the Pacific way for the management of Pacific tuna resources.

We said that this week’s workshop is making an important contribution to the ongoing discussion on this issue particularly in enhancing opportunities for dialogue across sector between government, non-government organisations, relevant actors, and the private sector. Drawing from the range of questions I have frequently heard, one of the key notes I would highlight is the lack of information. We know mining companies are keen to sign up exploration leases in the EEZ’s of Pacific countries but also in the high seas, at the same time there is concern that little is known about the biodiversity and natural resources of the deep sea of the Pacific and deep sea mining has potentially irreversible impacts. The limited studies undertaken indicate the level of species richness in the deep sea is very high; certain areas are significant for marine biodiversity including seamounts and hydrothermal vents. We understand that the marine biodiversity is highest between the depths of 1500-3000m. It’s very important that key areas of marine biodiversity are identified and effectively managed and protected as marine protected areas (MPA). This is essential for a resilient Pacific future.

In the deep sea there is currently so much that is unknown, studies of seamounts indicated that 1/3 of species are new to science so its likely that the more studies that are undertaken the more new species will be discovered – thus the key message is the collection of relevant marine environment data to help PIC’s know exactly what they are managing and the likely impacts of activities like deep seabed mining. Collection of such information is well beyond the resources of all PIC’s and regional agencies as well. In my view mining companies can, should and must support independent world class scientific studies of the biodiversity and the environment in the deep sea, particularly in relation with the impact associated with that activity. Concerted effort should be available to support PIC’s in increasing their knowledge and their ability to plan and manage impacts from this activity. So I sincerely hope that this week’s workshop will share on this knowledge and provide clear guidance on this issue and help us establish a way forward. What are the information needed, how we are going to address them, how will that information be used and applied?

The second issue is the need for clear and effective decision making frameworks. Any discussion on issues such as deep seabed mining must be within the framework of the Pacific

Oceanscape – this is the vision discussed and adopted by all Pacific leaders, this is our guiding framework and provides our marching orders. At the heart of the Pacific Oceanscape, is the recognition of the interconnected nature of marine resources and the need to manage them sustainably for future generations. It is essential that governments start pushing social and environmental assessments further up the schedule to influence decision making. In a nutshell, environmental assessments must take place before concessions and they must inform other ensuing assessments. Deep seabed mining requires a clear and effective process of strategic environmental impact assessment or SIA which must be both credible and objective. SIA must be based on the best information available and must build appropriate capacity within PIC's. Clear and effective planning systems must be applied. SPREP has been working for about 2 years on marine spatial planning with CSIRO and other partners such as GIZ, IUCN, and the French Marine Protected Areas. New project and funding are increasing with opportunities for support to PIC's in this area but much is required. Marine spatial planning, basically zoning in resource use involves assessment of information, identifying prescribed users within different areas, protection of the marine biodiversity areas and ensuring that all sectors including economic, social environment aspects are integrated into decision making. Approaches like this are fundamental for the resilience of long-term sustainable resource use in our region. SPREP has been actively supporting countries in SIA and EIA for more than 20 years – there are many lessons we have from this activity, both good and bad and our team will share these experience with you this week and also share our experience on marine spatial planning. I look forward for guidance from the workshop on these matters, how practically can we apply SIA to deep sea mining, what are the issues that need to be considered and how can it be applied in a way that is objective and credible.

The third issue is the need for effective involvement of key stakeholder groups. The Ambassador for Samoa based in New York once stated that no one has a mortgage of good ideas. Deep seabed mining is an issue in which we need to hear the views of all the stakeholders, governments, peoples of the Pacific, civil societies, NGO's and look at how we can address the concerns. This workshop is a timely and welcome initiative and workshop organisers have strived to ensure a good balance in the program. I invite you all to contribute your good ideas and expertise so we can come up with a good result.