



Government of Samoa

Fourth Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) Executive Board Meeting

Honourable Toeolesulusulu Cedric Pose Salesa Schuster
Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Lands

Opening Remarks

Wednesday 4 September 2024

Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, and honored guests,

Talofa and Welcome to Samoa and this Fourth SPREP Executive Board Meeting with its theme "***A Resilient Blue Pacific Continent Free of Plastics***," aligning seamlessly with the 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent and echoes the sentiment of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Tonga – "***A Transformative and Resilient Pasifiki: Build Better Now.***"

As you gather today, I urge you as to use this time relook at SPREP as a regional organization, if its fulfilling its functions and roles as technical advisor and capacity builder for our national institutions to address the environmental problems we face.

Is SPREP as an organization supporting and providing the technical advice and organizational support for our region when engaging in international environmental for a to ensure our problems and needs are being reflected in the global decisions.

Is SPREP as an organization initiating, coordinating and supporting the accessing of resources to implement our country priority environmental concerns, or its spending too much time implementing regional projects that result in higher administration costs.

Is SPREP as an organization espousing to build regional experts then sending them back to support the national institutions, or is SPREP prioritizing itself as an organization and retaining staff, thus continuing handicap our national institutions through brain drain.

Furthermore, I challenge you to critically analyze the effectiveness of SPREP after serving the region in the last 35 years. Has the environment improved in our countries and the region, or have the problems become worse? Are we as countries any closer to being independent to do the majority of the work ourselves or have we become even more dependent on SPREP to apply, managed and implement projects on our behalf.

Administratively, has SPREP as an organization grown too big, or does it need to expand to accommodate the many needs for the region. Has SPREP achieved financial sustainability or does it need more support from the countries and our partners, or is it only treading above water because of project funding. Either-way, a clear pathway in attaining financial sustainability is an important aspect for your deliberations.

These are challenges that we are the region look to you the Executive Board to deliberate and give us confidence that what was dreamt and started over 30 year ago, is still useful now, and can be sustained going into the future.

I want to acknowledge the past, present and future assistance by the countries, our partners and specifically those countries that contribute to the core budget funding since this is, in my humble opinion, is the only way this organization is able to chart its course properly, without being directed by the donor-funded project needs.

As we move forward, let us remember that our strength lies in our unity and shared commitment to a sustainable and resilient Pacific. Together, we can build a future that honors our natural heritage and secures the wellbeing of generations to come.

Thank you all for your dedication and participation. I look forward to productive discussions and meaningful outcomes from this meeting.

Faafetai.