

# Protecting Pacific environments from pollution



Majuro landfill, Republic of the Marshall Islands. © Tim Hartley

**Marine debris** affects Pacific economies; biodiversity; health; and resilience. There is limited local industry or capacity to meet the population's demands with sustainable materials, making import regulations critical.

“ Pacific environments require global commitments to sustainable consumption and production. ”

– Hon Alexander Teabo, Minister for Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development, Kiribati

**Pacific countries are heavily impacted by waste from local and global sources, with high dependence on imported products and with small-scale local markets far from overseas recycling centres.** Waste enters the region on ocean currents or on fishing vessels, cruise ships, and container ships. **Port waste-reception facilities** are in place for five countries (Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa), with interest in adding Lautoka in Fiji and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI).

**Pacific leaders are taking action.** In 2017, Pacific leaders stated the intention to ban the import and re-use of asbestos and to take measures to ban plastic microbeads, a subset of the microplastics problem. Leaders are moving to ban or levy key materials.

**There is substantial illegal discard of wastes by fishing vessels in South Pacific waters,** with **>10,000 known violations** in the past decade. Plastic discharge constituted 71% of these violations, and 71% of the incidents were from vessels of distant water fishing nations.

**The most prevalent (60–80%) types of marine debris are plastic materials,** considered a priority marine pollution issue facing the Pacific region.<sup>1</sup> Other priority materials and waste issues include lost and discarded fishing gear including fish aggregating devices (FADs), nuclear wastes, and military legacy (including oil from shipwrecks and unexploded ordnance).

## OUR APPROACH

We connect countries, partners, and donors to measure, manage, and reduce waste for healthy environments, a shared strategic priority identified by Pacific countries for both the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and UN Environment.

**Building institutional strength:** Many Pacific island countries have no current systematic management plan or system for marine litter prevention, management, and clean up/recovery.<sup>2</sup>

**Committing to reduce pollution:** The first UN Ocean Conference resulted in 549 **commitments** to address **SDG 14.1** on marine pollution, with >200 related to plastic product recycling, recovery or restriction. **Our Ocean 2017 commitments** included 58 country-led and 50 agency commitments targeting marine pollution.

**Supporting integration:** Multi-sectoral, product life-cycle approaches are needed, taking advantage of Pacific private sector leadership and regional frameworks. Clean and beautiful island environments support economies, and many resorts conduct their own waste management initiatives. Assistance is needed for waste reduction and waste treatment after segregation. A regional recycling association, initiated by Waste Management Co. of Samoa, will lobby for and create recycling options.

**Supporting science:** We partner with universities and research agencies to grow our knowledge of sources, impacts, and solutions.



Find Pacific marine litter news and data:  
[www.sprep.org/marinepollution](http://www.sprep.org/marinepollution)  
#CleanSeas

Financial damage of plastics to marine ecosystems = USD 8.1 billion annually

97% of Pacific fish species have ingested plastic

#BeatPollution



<sup>1</sup> Twenty Seventh SPREP Meeting of Officials, 2016. Marine Plastics and Debris Management. 27SM/Officials/WP.9.3.2. at 2

<sup>2</sup> SPREP, 2016. Cleaner Pacific 2025: Pacific Regional Waste and Pollution Management Strategy 2016–2025. Apia, Samoa

## PACIFIC ISLANDS TAKING ACTION

The Pacific Forum Leaders committed to fast track policies to ban the use of single-use plastic bags, plastic and Styrofoam packaging. The Republic of the Marshall Islands are putting through a conservation management measure to address pollution MARPOL violations from fishing vessels.

### BANS: SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS

**American Samoa** (Jan. 2010)  
**CNMI** (Aug. 2017)  
**RMI** (Feb. 2017)  
**Palau** (Nov. 2017)  
**Yap, FSM** (2014)  
**Pohnpei, FSM** (Sep. 2011)  
**Samoa** (2005)

### INTENTION TO BAN:

**Vanuatu** (2017)  
**Kosrae and Chuuk FSM**  
**Solomon Islands**

### BANS: OTHER MATERIALS

**RMI** • Styrofoam cups and plates, disposable plastic cups and plates (Feb. 2017)  
**Pacific wide** • Asbestos ban (Sept. 2017)

### INTENTION TO BAN:

**Samoa** • disposable nappies (2007)  
**Vanuatu** • single-use plastic bottles (2018)

### LEVIES AND DEPOSITS

**Fiji** • single-use plastic bags, 10 cent FJD (Aug. 2017)  
**Kiribati** • container deposit, lead-cell batteries  
**Palau** • container deposit  
**Kosrae** • Container deposit  
**Yap** • Container deposit  
**New Caledonia** • Used oil levy, e-waste levy  
**French Polynesia** • Used oil levy

### INTENTION TO LEVY:

**Samoa** • used oil levy  
**Fiji** • used oil levy  
**Vanuatu** • used oil levy

Discarded fishing gear. © Tim Hartley

## PARTNER WITH US

We work with governments, communities, and the private sector to create healthy communities and environments. We seek to mobilise resources and support to stop pollution at the source through strong Pacific governance.

Join us to create **Clean Seas for a Cleaner Pacific**.

## LIMITED LANDFILLS

Only 15 sanitary landfill sites have been built in the Pacific, and operational challenges often prevent adherence to sanitary standards. Even sites like **Naboro Landfill** in Fiji cannot manage new wastes such as batteries from the hundreds of hybrid electric cars that have been imported into Fiji. The 14 countries, 7 territories and thousands of inhabited Pacific islands rely on limited waste management measures, including unlined, uncovered dumpsites and open burning. Untreated leachate is directly harmful to local water supplies and surrounding ecosystems.

## WHO BENEFITS

Pollution is not just a waste management problem: the multiple impacts of marine debris cross many sectors.

Beyond the set of **hazardous waste and pollution Conventions**, waste management is part of meeting all SDGs and **multilateral environment agreements** (MEAs). The threats to health, fish stocks, native species diversity, and threatened species make waste management a key element of meeting obligations to goals regarding biodiversity, food security, poverty reduction, sanitation. The potential for waste-to-energy can help meet renewable energy goals in decent work environments for sustainable communities.

Two **regional** conventions are of particular importance: the Waigani Convention (11 Pacific Parties), controlling the movement and management of hazardous wastes within the Pacific islands region, and the Noumea Convention (8 Pacific Parties), a well-rounded framework for environmental management to support ecosystem health and Pacific people. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is the **secretariat** of these regional Conventions.

To learn more about our work preventing pollution in the Pacific islands, please contact

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**SPREP**  
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional  
Environment Programme

*A resilient Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.*