

Response from SPREP Staff to the Final Reports of the Independent Review Team (IRT)

(18 August, 2014)

GENERAL

This document sets out the views of the SPREP Secretariat on the Final Reports of the IRT. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT regarding many aspects of the improved performance of SPREP over the last 5 years. We believe this reflects an enormous amount of work by all SPREP staff, working cooperatively and effectively with SPREP Members and Partners over this period. This document is structured in two sections and outlines comments on the Executive Summary and Recommendations for: (a) the Second Independent Corporate Review of SPREP (*pages 1-7*); and (b) the Mid Term Review of the SPREP Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (*pages 7 – 10*).

(A) COMMENTS ON THE SECOND INDEPENDENT CORPORATE REVIEW OF SPREP

Comments on Executive Summary

SPREP's Mandate, Executive Summary, points 4 to 7

1. The IRT notes SPREP has a clear mandate to deliver on the protection, improvement and sustainable development of the Pacific regional environment. This is strongly supported by the Secretariat which believes the SPREP mandate is clearly defined in the 1993 Agreement which established SPREP, and through the vision and associated strategic directions of the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan.
2. The Secretariat agrees with the IRT statement that: *“any challenges about working to, and fulfilling this mandate are more about SPREP’s partners and other stakeholders having an equally clear understanding of the origins and authority of this mandate, and about the roles that SPREP must and does play in delivering to its mandate”*. The Secretariat also notes that some partners and stakeholders may in fact have a clear understanding of the SPREP mandate but may be unwilling to accept this mandate in certain circumstances.
3. Over the last 5 years SPREP has significantly increased our work on delivery on our mandate and on associated communication of our mandate. The Secretariat has made a major effort over the last 5 years to cooperate and partner with other organisations and we note, with appreciation, the comments from the IRT regarding the new *“spirit of cooperation with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations over the last 5 years”* (point 8). We also note the comment (point 13) that *“there is increased satisfaction with SPREP’s performance, as expressed by PICT Members at recent SPREP Annual Meetings”*.

4. However, the Secretariat recognizes and accepts the need to do more and be smarter about addressing the challenges identified in the mandate section, such as those suggested by the IRT in point 4.
5. The Secretariat strongly supports regional cooperation and coordination and, in particular, the new Framework for Pacific Regionalism. We believe it is important to link our work to the achievement of this Framework, while keeping our work within the scope of our mandate.
6. The Secretariat agrees with the IRT statement on the need to link SPREP's work on delivering environmental outcomes with efforts to improve livelihoods and sustainable economic development in the Pacific region. We believe this has been a key feature of SPREP's work over 40 years in the region. It is important SPREP has a focused approach to work on sustainable development and livelihoods, and that such work is undertaken in the context of SPREP's mandate and strategic directions, as set out in the SPREP Strategic Plan. We note and agree with the IRT report regarding the strong links between sustainable economic development and biodiversity and ecosystem management.

Improving Performance Executive Summary, points 8 to 13

7. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT regarding the improved performance of SPREP over the last 5 years. We are pleased that the IRT notes, in point 13, that: *"there is increased satisfaction with SPREP's performance, as expressed by PICT Members at recent SPREP Annual Meetings"*. The Secretariat believes this reflects an enormous amount of work by all SPREP staff, working cooperatively and effectively with SPREP Members and Partners.

Assessment of Progress Executive Summary, points 14 to 23

8. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT in point 14 that: *"the Secretariat has made an exemplary effort to implement the many recommendations (in the 2008 Review) and that this is a major and heartening change to the way in which the Organisation had responded to earlier reviews"*.
9. The Secretariat notes in reference to point 16 the Internal Audit Unit was established in mid-July 2012 and the Secretariat is currently observing and taking note of the work load of the Internal Audit Unit. Given financial resources available, the Secretariat will look into this matter in accordance with recommendations provided by the Audit Committee, which the unit reports directly too.
10. Regarding staff training (point 20) the Secretariat notes the concern of the IRT regarding: *"the small number of (staff training) needs that have been, or will be, addressed in 2014"* and believes this needs to be put in perspective. Training programmes were introduced at SPREP - for the first time in our 40 year history - in 2012. Training needs are being addressed within available resources and the Secretariat will progressively address staff training and development needs identified in staff Performance Development Plans. For the 2014 plan, priorities were discussed

by Directors and the Senior Management Team, and the major emphasis was agreed for leadership and management training and programmes are being implemented. We note and support the IRT comment that: *“Members may wish to consider making more resources available to the Secretariat so that identified and prioritised training and development needs are addressed in a timely manner”*.

11. Regarding development and communication of lessons learnt and best practices, (point 21), the Secretariat notes there have been a number of efforts in this area, both internally and with a wider group of practitioners. Internally, these include through instituting a regular Staff Seminar Series and through regular all staff meetings. Externally, these efforts have included documenting and disseminating information on major projects, such as PACC and PIGGAREP and through a major effort on web based communication and social media. Similarly, we believe there have been major efforts to strengthen outreach and communication (point 22). However, the Secretariat notes the IRT comments on these areas and will increase the priority and attention to these areas, within available resources.
12. Regarding country focal points (point 23) the Secretariat notes there has been some action in this area, including through having informal contact points within the Secretariat, through broadening of the SPREP Focal Point List, and through the appointment of SPREP staff within some Pacific countries. However we agree that more work should be undertaken in this area.

Assessment of Responsiveness Executive Summary, point 24

13. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT in point 24 that: *“evidence shows an exceptionally high level of responsiveness by the Secretariat, resulting in the timely delivery and achievement of many significant outputs and outcomes that have been requested by (SPREP) Meetings”*.

Addressing Cross-Cutting Issues and Safeguards Executive Summary, points 25 and 26

14. The Secretariat agrees with the need for more work on this area and believes the Medium Sized project to be funded by GEF (point 26) will make a difference.
15. The Secretariat notes that work with Francophone Members (point 26) has increased over the last 5 years but also agrees that we need to continue and expand this work. Support from the Government of France, such as for a French secondment at SPREP, has made a difference and we hope this support will continue and increase in the future.

Managing Organisational Risk Executive Summary, point 27

16. The Secretariat agrees with the IRT that the preparation of a Risk Management Plan has been an important part of SPREP’s overall institutional strengthening. The Secretariat will continue to strengthen its work in this area and to report to SPREP members on key risks and challenges facing the institution. The Audit Committee, with the Internal Auditor, has completed the review of the current Risk Management Plan. It is noted that the implementation of the Risk

Management Plan 2011 is about 90% complete. The Secretariat through the Senior Management Team will implement recommendations accordingly, given financial resources available. The new Risk Management Plan will be in the upcoming Annual Plan.

Business Planning Executive Summary, points 28 to 34

17. The Secretariat notes a Business Plan will be submitted to the 2014 SPREP Meeting for consideration. We believe this addresses many of the points raised by the IRT.
18. We also note the financial sustainability of SPREP has improved substantially over recent years through increased core funding, in particular though Australia and New Zealand shifting to Multi Year funding, and through increased project funding, reflecting the increasing confidence of donors and partners in SPREP. This has led to a major increase in direct support provided to SPREP Members in the Pacific to address their environmental and sustainable development priorities. SPREP has reported annually since 2010, to all PICTs on projects, and their dollar value, implemented in their countries/territories. We understand we are the only CROP agency to undertake this level of reporting.
19. The Secretariat notes the challenges of project versus core funding are common to all CROP agencies and this issue has existed at SPREP over all of its 40 year history. The Secretariat notes one of the most effective way to increase core funding for SPREP is through an increase in SPREP Membership Fees, which have remained unchanged over the last 11 years. This issue will be discussed at the 2014 SPREP Meeting.

Decentralisation Executive Summary, point 35

20. The Secretariat has proceeded with decentralisation in line with the directions from SPREP Members and in line with available resources. This issue will be discussed at the 2014 SPREP meeting and the Secretariat recommendation is for a full assessment of current decentralisation initiatives at the 2015 SM.

Governance Executive Summary, points 36 to 46

21. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT in point 36 that: *“SPREP’s governance structure has been strengthened in recent years.....as a consequence SPREP’s reputation has been enhanced. The Secretariat is more visible to Members, gaining their confidence as well as that of donors”.*
22. The Secretariat notes the comments regarding the Troika (point 27) and notes the Troika was established by Members to undertake the review of the DG’s performance and report to the annual SPREP meeting. Additional roles, such as involvement with the Audit Committee were opportunistic to take advantage of the first ever face to face meeting of the Troika in 2014, they were not “assigned”. The Secretariat believes the Troika could provide a useful body for providing input from members between the Annual SPREP Meetings, but that any further and

expanded role of the Troika should be a matter for members to decide. The Secretariat will, as always, provide whatever support is required.

23. The Secretariat has made every effort to ensure the preparation of the Annual Work Plan and Budget (point 38) is an inclusive process, including through: (a) consultations between members and SPREP staff, including the Director General, on priority issues during country visits; (b) circulation of all WB&B papers to all SPREP Members 6 weeks prior to each years' SPREP meeting; and (c) discussion at SPREP Meetings. The Secretariat would welcome suggestions from SPREP Members for improvement of the existing processes in this area.
24. The SPREP meeting has been substantially restructured in recent years to allow more discussion and focus on technical issues, (point 40), such as through the Pacific Environment Forum and through greater emphasis on technical issues within the SM. The Secretariat welcomes any input from Members (point 41), at any time, on any matter to be discussed at each years' SPREP meeting. The Secretariat would welcome suggestions from SPREP Members for improvement of the existing processes regarding the SPREP Meeting to address points raised by the ICR.
25. The Secretariat notes suggestions from the IRT for the establishment of an intercessional making body (point 45) and notes proposals for a SPREP Board from the 2008 ICR were not accepted by SPREP meetings in 2009 and 2010, clearly indicating a lack of interest from members in having such an intercessional body at that time. SMT notes the Troika could potentially carry out such a role but that this is a matter for consideration by Members. The Secretariat will support whatever process Members agree upon.

Coordination and Cooperation Executive Summary, points 47 to 49

26. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the recognition by the IRT of the number of instances of across Division coordination and project implementation and agrees with the IRT that more can and should be done in this area. We support the IRT suggestion (point 49) that: *“greater coordination and cooperation between the (four) strategic priorities should be a feature of the next strategic plan”*.

Partnerships – Non-governmental Organisations and the Private Sector Executive Summary, points 50 to 53

27. The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT in point 50 that: *“The Secretariat has been highly successful in bringing on board numerous new donors and other partners”*. The Secretariat notes the increasing number of partnerships developed over the last 5 years reflects the wish and strong willingness of Partners to work closely and effectively with SPREP, and also an increasing awareness of the increasing strength and important role of SPREP. The Secretariat believes MoU signed over the last 5 years have assisted in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and/or the Annual Work Plan.
28. The Secretariat supports the IRT suggestions (point 51) for the need to clarify internal processes regarding partnerships: *“including the development of an internal policy to provide the secretariat with clear guidance on seeking out, agreeing to, or declining partnership funding*

opportunities” and also suggestions regarding the role of the SPREP Members and Meeting. The Secretariat also supports the IRT suggestions (point 53) for stakeholder mapping and engagement.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting Executive Summary, points 54 and 55

29. The Secretariat agrees that performance monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning processes undertaken by the secretariat are evolving and strengthening. We note there is much more work to be undertaken and believe the recent appointment of an M&E Adviser at SPREP will assist in accelerating and strengthening our effort in this area. The Secretariat notes that many donors and partners, including Metropolitan Members of SPREP, are all developing systems in monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning and there would be much mutual benefits from closer cooperation on these areas. The Secretariat intends to progress its capacity to report on the longer term outcomes of its work and streamline this with developments in the broader state of the environment reporting where possible, though notes that this will require input from, and close consultation and coordination with, all its members.

Comparative advantage Executive Summary, points 56 to 61

30. The Secretariat notes and agrees with the IRT comments regarding the comparative advantages of SPREP. We note and agree with the suggestions from IRT regarding this issue, such as the need to be aware of and respond to changing dynamics in the region (point 59) and the need to make greater use of peer learning networks (point 61)

Looking to the Future Executive Summary, points 62 to 67

31. The Secretariat agrees with the IRT (point 62) that the next two years will be an important time for SPREP, including with the conclusion of contracts of the Director General and some SMT Members, as well as a number of external factors such as the new Strategy for Climate and Disaster Resilient Development. We believe there is thus a need for clear and effective transition planning and that there continues to be close cooperation and consultation between the Secretariat and SPREP Members.

32. The Secretariat agrees that the next Strategic Plan (SP) must address emerging issues, such as deep-sea mineral extraction and the Blue-Green Economy, (point 64) while noting that SPREP is already involved in these issues. We also agree with the inclusion of Corporate Services in the next Strategic Plan (point 65). We believe there are merits in a longer time frame for the next Strategic Plan, (point 67), although this is a matter for guidance and advice from SPREP Members.

Institutional Strengthening Executive Summary, points 68 to 71

33. The Secretariat notes that progress with institutional strengthening over the last 5 years has been substantial but that further work is required. The Secretariat agrees with suggestions from the IRT (point 68) regarding the Strategic Planning and Information Unit, a Project Review and

Monitoring Group and a donor liaison officer, with this position being subject to funding. We believe the suggestions for Integrated Country Programmes (point 70) has merit and should be further discussed at the SPREP Meeting.

Organisational Capacity Report Card Executive Summary, point 72

- 34.** The Secretariat notes, with appreciation, the positive comments from the IRT in point 72 that the Report Card: *“Highlights the tremendous improvements in SPREP’s organisational capacity and overall performance”*.
- 35.** The Secretariat believes however that some ratings of the Report Card, should be higher, given the actual major improvement in performance of the Secretariat as outlined in the various evidence based documents, such as the Report on the Implementation of the 2008 Independent Corporate Review, prepared by the Secretariat and the “Case Study of the Change Management” process at SPREP.
- 36.** A point of specific concern for us is the low '2' rating for 'programmes demonstrate tangible outcomes, commensurate with the resources invested' in the Programme Delivery and Impact category. We do not agree with this assessment and can demonstrate that this is not the case. Importantly, the assessment/rating for this criterion is fundamental in terms of donor confidence in the organisation. We would request that the rating be amended. Also, all ratings need to be comprehensively explained and justified.

Comments on Recommendations (R)

- 37.** The Secretariat has provided some comments below regarding the recommendations in the IRT Report. Where no comments are provided the Secretariat is in agreement with the Recommendation as outlined.
- I. **R2** – responding to this requires more information from the IRT and/or Members as to which directives from previous SPREP Meetings require more substantive responses.
 - II. **R3** - Internal Audit needs are specific to each CROP agency and thus the need for or the value of a Joint Internal Audit Unit is unclear.
 - III. **R5** - Issues raised by staff are being addressed and the SPREP Secretariat and management will continue to work on any issues, in consultation with staff, and within available resources.
 - IV. **R14** – “Establish and” should be changed to “Continue to”.
 - V. **R18** – The thrust of this recommendation is agreed but SPREP involvement needs to be focused and within available resources. The recommendation should be re-worded accordingly.
 - VI. **R19** – The thrust of this recommendation is agreed but SPREP involvement needs to be focused and within available resources. The recommendation should be re-worded accordingly.
 - VII. **R20** – The Secretariat suggests this recommendation be considered within the context of Membership Contributions (which will be discussed at the 2014 SM).

- VIII. **R26** – The PCCC has been discussed and agreed by previous SPREP meetings. It has also been agreed by the Government of Japan. The impact of this recommendation would be to defer a decision on this matter, with the associated risk of losing funding and momentum for this Centre.
- IX. **R28** – This is actioned and a Business Plan will be considered by the 2014 SPREP Meeting.

(B) COMMENTS ON MID TERM REVIEW OF THE SPREP STRATEGIC PLAN (2011 – 2015)

Comments on Executive Summary

Background, Executive Summary, points 1 to 4

38. The Secretariat notes there is considerable overlap between this report and the Second Independent Review of SPREP, which reflects the close interrelationship between these two documents.

Assessing Effectiveness, Efficiency and Relevance, points 5 to 14

39. The Secretariat notes that SPREP is seeking to shift to a greater focus on outcome reporting, in line with overall efforts to strengthen SPREP's Monitoring and Evaluation systems. We note there is much more work to be undertaken and believe the recent appointment of an M&E Adviser at SPREP will assist in accelerating and strengthening our effort in this area. The Secretariat notes that many donors and partners, including Metropolitan Members of SPREP, are all seeking to improve outcome reporting, and like SPREP, find this a challenging area. The Secretariat believes there would be mutual benefits from closer cooperation on these areas.
40. The Secretariat considers the fact that reporting mainly by activities and outputs rather than outcomes is not a constraint to the assessment of the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan.
41. The Secretariat is pleased to note the high level of achievement of targets in the Strategic Plan is highlighted by the IRT (points 7 to 11). The Secretariat is also pleased to note the IRT notes the "commendable level of efficiency" in meeting Strategic Plan targets (point 12) in relation to disbursement of funds.
42. Regarding the level of personnel costs, (point 13), SPREP notes that staff costs as a percentage of total budget have reduced significantly over the last 5 years and this reflects the increasing level of support and resources being directed to Pacific island Members of SPREP.
43. The Secretariat is pleased to note that the ICR comment in point 14, that "a majority of questionnaire respondents regionally consider that SPREP is responding adequately to the prioritised needs of their country and territory" and further "that the targets in the current Strategic Plan are appropriate". The Secretariat agrees with the IRT that targets should be strengthened and involve a greater focus on outcomes and impacts; however we believe this is neither necessary nor practical at this stage, and should be addressed in the next Strategic Plan. Such revision should take into account the points raised by the IRT, such as SMART indicators.

Resourcing the Strategic Plan, points 15 to 18

44. The Secretariat notes and agrees with the challenges of resourcing the Strategic Plan, (point 15). We also note the financial sustainability of SPREP has improved substantially over recent years through increased core funding, in particular through Australia and New Zealand shifting to Multi Year funding, and through increased project funding, reflecting the increasing confidence of donors and partners in SPREP. This has led to a major increase in direct support provided to SPREP Members in the Pacific to address their environmental and sustainable development priorities. The Secretariat notes the challenges of project versus core funding are common to all CROP agencies and this issue has existed at SPREP over all of its 40 year history. We will continue to work to improve this situation.
45. The Secretariat notes that the past disparity between the budgets of 4 Divisions, (point 15) is less of an issue in the draft 2015 SPREP Budget, where the budget allocations between Divisions are: Climate Change (26%); Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management (19.6%); Waste management and Pollution (24.6%); Executive Management and Corporate Support (20.4%); and Environmental Monitoring and Governance (9.4%).
46. The Secretariat believes its work is *“gaining traction in each Pacific Island Country and Territory (PICT)”*, (point 16), based on: the positive feedback received at SPREP meetings; the responses to the IRT Questionnaires from members and partners; and the positive feedback generally received from members, donors, and partners over the last few years.
47. The Secretariat believes that managing the diversity of funding sources and the predictability of funds should be a key element of the SPREP Business Plan which will be considered by the 2014 SPREP meeting.

Strategic Planning and Implementation, points 19 to 30

48. The Secretariat disagrees that: *“there is a lack of clarity regarding SPREP’s focus at the operational level, as opposed to the strategic planning level”*, (point 19). The Strategic Plan articulates the vision and the basis for defining strategic priorities (SP p. 12), and this is addressed operationally through the consideration and agreement on the Annual Workplan and Budget and further addressed by the decision making processes within the Secretariat, in particular through the meetings of the Senior Management Team.
49. The balance between Divisions regarding budgets and programmes, (point 21) is improving. For example, see above point regarding 2015 budget allocations between Divisions. The Secretariat agrees with point 21, on the need to link SPREP’s work on delivering environmental outcomes with efforts to improve livelihoods and sustainable economic development in the Pacific region. We believe this has been a key feature of SPREP’s work over 40 years in the region. It is important that SPREP has a focused approach to work on sustainable development and livelihoods, and that such work is undertaken in the context of SPREP’s mandate and strategic directions, as set out in the SPREP Strategic Plan.

50. The Secretariat supports the IRT suggestion in point 23 regarding the need for inclusion of Corporate Services within the next Strategic Plan, as well as the need for this plan to have a greater focus on outcomes.
51. The Secretariat agrees with the IRT comment that the next Strategic Plan should be for a 10 year period, and that this will provide the: *“opportunity to work towards, deliver and document tangible outcomes and somewhat longer-term impacts”*, (point 25).

Organisational Capacity Report Card for SPREP, point 31

52. The Secretariat believes that some ratings of the Report Card should be higher, given the actual major improvement in performance of the Secretariat as outlined in the various evidence based documents, such as the Report on the Implementation of the 2008 Independent Corporate Review, prepared by the Secretariat and the Case Study of the Change Management process at SPREP.
53. A point of specific concern for us is the low '2' rating for *'programmes demonstrate tangible outcomes, commensurate with the resources invested'* in the Programme Delivery and Impact category. We do not agree with this assessment and can demonstrate that this is not the case. Importantly, the assessment/rating for this criterion is fundamental in terms of donor confidence in the organisation. We would request that the rating be amended. Also, all ratings need to be comprehensively explained and justified.

Comments on Recommendations (R)

54. The Secretariat has provided some comments below regarding the recommendations in the Mid Term Review (MTR) Report. Where no comments are provided the Secretariat is in agreement with the Recommendation as outlined.
 - X. **R8** – this should be reworded to focus on implementation of the Business Plan which will be considered and hopefully adopted at the 2014 SPREP Meeting.
 - XI. **R14** – needs to be reworded to reflect the fact that we need to prioritise involvement in wider policy and planning processes, and that such involvement must be within available resources.