

WEBINAR - LAYING THE PACIFIC BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A GLOBAL AGREEMENT TO COMBAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

SUMMARY REPORT



OVERVIEW

On Thursday 20th August 2020, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) hosted a webinar entitled *Laying the Pacific Building Blocks for a Global Agreement to Combat Plastic Pollution* in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), World Wildlife Fund for Nature Pacific (WWF) and the Centre for International Environmental Law. The session was convened to further elevate the issue of plastic pollution on the regional agenda in the build up to several key milestones of significance to addressing this issue on the global level. These includes the 4th session of the Ad-hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHEG) in November 2020, and the AHEG Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation. These milestones will be critical to ensure that Pacific interests are upheld and voices heard in the upcoming United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) negotiations towards a global agreement to tackle plastic pollution.

The webinar included high level presentations and interventions from Fiji, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tonga, Palau and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in addition to Massey University's Political Ecology Research Unit presenting new research on the legislative framework for tackling plastic pollution in the region. Biographies of panellists are provided in Annex 1.

THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

- How Pacific island nations are responding to the global plastic crisis, and if the measures taken are having the expected results.
- Regional initiatives in place to address plastic pollution.
- If the plastic pollution problem in the Pacific would benefit from a global solution.
- How Pacific voices can be heard, and interests safeguarded, for the upcoming UNEA negotiations towards a global agreement on plastic pollution.

INTRODUCTION AND FACILITATION

The webinar was moderated by Christina Dixon, Senior Ocean Campaigner, on behalf of EIA. After welcoming panellists and participants, she gave a brief overview of plastic pollution in the Pacific. This included underscoring how Pacific island countries and territories (PICTs) contribute less than 1.3% of the mismanaged plastic in the world's oceans yet due to the transboundary nature of plastic pollution are one of its main recipients. Christina emphasised the depth and complexity of threats to large-ocean small-island states, and how tourism, fisheries and aquaculture – industries of significant importance to PICTs – are some of the most impacted of all commercial sectors globally.¹ She also highlighted the evidence of damage to coral reefs, ecosystems, human health and food security, further detail of which is provided in EIA's briefing '[Islands of Opportunity.](#)'

PRESENTATIONS

The webinar saw presentations by representatives from the governments of Fiji and Tuvalu, in addition to Massey University and SPREP. An outline of their contributions is provided below:

Anthony Talouli, Acting Director, Waste Management and Pollution Control, SPREP

Mr. Talouli firstly elaborated on the context of plastic pollution in the Pacific, including fundamental issues such as one-way flow of commodities, illegal dumpsites, and land scarcity, and existential risks such as natural disasters and climate change. While climate change is recognised as the single largest threat to the region, it was mentioned that the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) has consistently urged its members to tackle this issue since 2017. Mr. Talouli detailed the work that SPREP has been doing in the region over past years, including the development of an integrated waste management strategy laid out in 'Cleaner Pacific 2025' – the Pacific Regional Waste and Pollution Management Strategy 2016 – 2025. The implementation of this strategy was discussed in the context of opportunities for the Pacific moving forward, including technical and financial support, developing markets for secondary materials, leadership in preserving the "Blue Continent" and the development of a global legal framework.

Joshua Wycliffe, Permanent Secretary, Fiji Department of Environment

Mr. Wycliffe underscored how plastic pollution is an existential threat to the people and culture of Fiji, and which practical measures have been implemented at the national level to combat it. This has included coastal site auditing, plastic bag bans and levies, expanding waste collection services to rural areas, tightening surveillance, and incentivising a domestic recycling industry through tax breaks. Fiji are eager to work with regional partners including SPREP to build on these initiatives. Mr. Wycliffe concluded by stressing Fijian support for a global governance framework to assist work at the national level, address overseas waste, and give Pacific access to the technical and financial resources that are required to address this global problem in Fiji.

Soseala Tinilau, Director, Department of Environment Tuvalu

Mr. Tinilau elaborated on the impacts of plastic pollution in from a Tuvaluan perspective, including soil degradation and reduced crop fertility, marine and freshwater chemical pollution, and how landfilling has not been a useful solution (see Fig.1). Mr. Tinilau drew upon recent domestic legislation to ban the importation and sale of eight major sources of single use plastics such as cutlery, straws, and cling film. Despite these initiatives, it was emphasised that the transboundary nature of plastic pollution, including the scourge of discarded fishing gear, makes plastic pollution exceedingly difficult to combat. Tuvalu delivered an intervention at UNEA-4 on resolution 4/6 on behalf of PICTs and are eager to participate in upcoming milestones such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation and AHEG meeting to raise their voice in support of immediate global action. Mr. Tinilau concluded by underscoring explicit Tuvaluan support for a new legally binding global agreement (see Fig.2), one that includes technical and financial knowledge

¹ UNEP (2014) Valuing Plastics: The Business Case for Measuring, Managing and Disclosing Plastic Use in the Consumer Goods Industry. p.1. Available [here](#).

exchange, global reduction targets, national action plans, robust monitoring and reporting and a dedicated scientific body.

Figure 1: Soseala Tinilau, Director of the Department of Environment in Tuvalu, discusses the disastrous impact of plastic pollution in Tuvalu



Figure 2: Soseala Tinilau, Director of the Department of Environment in Tuvalu, outlines Tuvalu’s position on a prospective new global agreement



Dr Trisia Farrelly, Senior Lecturer, Co-Director, Political Ecology Research Centre, Massey University

Dr. Farrelly introduced her research team’s Gap Analysis of the policies, plans, legislation, and strategies with relevance to addressing plastic pollution across 10 Pacific island countries. The purpose of this research was to identify policy framework limitations to *preventing* plastic pollution and the potential for implementing Pillar Two (prevention) of EIA’s proposed structure of a multilateral plastic pollution Convention (see EIA, CIEL and GAIA’s report ‘[Convention on Plastic Pollution](#)’ for more detail). The 5 major

themes used in the analytical framework were: Global Objectives, Prevention, Management, Standardisation and Microplastics.

Key findings include little mention of the indivisible links between plastic pollution and climate change, and of the toxic impacts of plastic pollution and human health protections therein, an emphasis on consumer rather than importer or producer responsibility, and a lack of inter-ministerial coordination. Furthermore, Dr. Farrelly underscored the limitations of what domestic and regional policy can realistically achieve considering the transboundary inflows of plastic pollution, and an inability to influence runaway plastic production and manufacture that takes place outside of PICT jurisdictions. Several recommendations are emergent from [the report](#), one of which is the development of national plastic pollution elimination action plans – or national action plans - that would facilitate the transposition of global obligations into the national context through clear targets and roadmaps. They would address the full lifecycle of plastics, prioritising the prevention of problematic plastics from entering the region over end-of-pipe and false solutions such as landfill investment, downcycling and incineration. Dr. Farrelly highlighted the endorsement of the regional Marine Litter Action Plan 2018 – 2025 (MLAP) through the Kainaki II declaration in 2019, which includes the strategic action to “*support the development of a global legal framework.*” She concluded by reiterating the urgent need for a global agreement for the Pacific region and the importance of PICT backing to secure the critical mass of support needed to establish a negotiating committee at UNEA-5.

INTERVENTIONS

The webinar saw interventions by state representatives from Vanuatu, Palau, and Tonga. An outline of their contributions is provided below.

H.E. Laurent Parenté, Vanuatu Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and chair of the IMO Technical Cooperation Committee

Mr Parenté began with clarifying the interlinkages between the IMO and a prospective global agreement. A rough global assessment estimates that 80% of marine plastic pollution comes from land-based as opposed to sea-based sources, positioning the IMO as a key institution to tackle sea-based sources of marine litter. Mr. Parenté used the example of the IMO Marine Litter Action Plan to outline how PICTs can trigger changes within UN organisations despite robust existing sets of regulations that prevent dumping of plastic waste into the ocean. In 2018, two submissions were made to the IMO on behalf of Pacific island countries to enhance existing regulations to tackle marine plastic litter from ships through the IMO. The first was co-sponsored by Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands and Palau, with the other co-sponsored by SPREP, Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu the Cook Islands, Palau, the Solomon Islands, and the Marshall Islands. These proposals triggered the development of the IMO Marine Litter Action Plan, with 17 of its 30 actions derived directly from these submissions. Mr. Parenté used this example to convey the remarkable capacity PICTs have in influencing UN decision-making processes on matters that are of significance to the region. He concluded with highlighting the unique opportunity that exists for PICTs to lead the call for a new global agreement to combat plastic pollution, both from land- and sea-based sources.

H.E. Viliami Va'inga Tone, Permanent Representative of Tonga to the United Nations, New York

Mr. Tone used Tonga's intervention to draw attention to the alarming rate of plastic discharges into the ocean, and how the threat plastic pollution poses cannot be understated. He conveyed the various domestic efforts in motion to tackle the issue in Tonga, including the development of a policy framework and phasing out of single-use plastics in 2021. He noted the Tongan perspective that plastic pollution is a global rather than national or regional issue, and consequently requires a global solution to address it.

Admiral Cristiano Aliperta, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Palau to the IMO

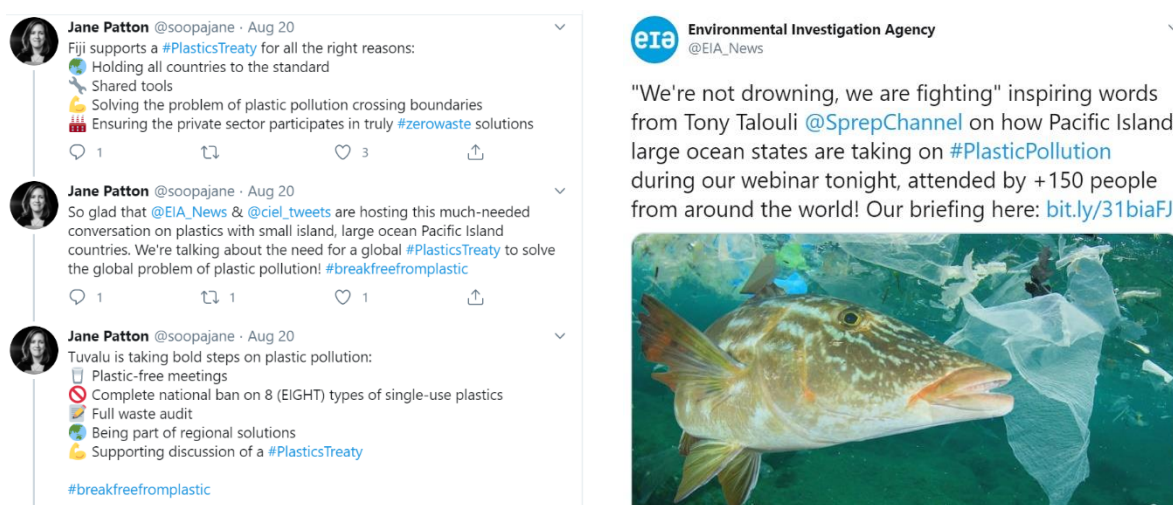
Admiral Aliperta used Palau's intervention to reiterate the importance of the work conducted alongside Vanuatu and other PICTs at the IMO, and the significance of this work for large-ocean states such as those

in the Pacific. He further noted how a unified Pacific position on related matters can hold significant weight in influencing negotiations at the global level.

PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The webinar lasted a total of 96 minutes, received 348 registrations, and was attended by 168 people from around the world, with representation from civil society, governments, and the private sector. Participant engagement was significant and energetic, with a number of questions asked on an array of topics. This included questions relating to human health impacts of plastic pollution, creating an enabling environment for the circular economy in the Pacific, the informal waste collection sector, and the UNEA process. Unfortunately, many questions were unable to be answered due to a lack of time.

Figure 3: Examples of Twitter coverage during and after the webinar



IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

It was apparent from the contributions that there is widespread support for a new global agreement to combat plastic pollution on behalf of the Pacific states represented. State representatives demonstrated a depth of understanding and insight on the issue and displayed leadership in their support for an ambitious global response option.

The webinar further served as a springboard for sharing knowledge and ideas ahead of the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation taking place the following week (26th and 27th August) as part of the formal AHEG discussions on potential response options. As mentioned by SPREP, “Pacific island countries are not drowning, they are fighting.” As was accomplished on the topic of climate change and the formulation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the global level, PICTs have a unique and untimely opportunity to bring the plastic pollution fight to the global arena to secure an ambitious and coordinated framework for addressing plastic pollution at the international level.

Initially this will take the form of active engagement in the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on the 26th and 27th August, and subsequent identification of collective needs and expectations for what a global convention could deliver for the Pacific. Identifying these requirements would inform interventions at the 4th AHEG in November 2020 and UNEA-5.

Furthermore, the securement of a high-level regional declaration in support of a global agreement would position the Pacific to formally join Nordic, Caribbean and African regions in their call for a global agreement. A high-level Pacific declaration will be instrumental in ensuring adequate momentum for a negotiation mandate for a new Convention to be established at UNEA-5.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PANELLISTS

- National and regional declarations in support of a new legally binding global agreement.
- Signing and ratification of outstanding regional instruments (Noumea Convention, Noumea Emergencies Protocol, Noumea Dumping Protocol, and the Waigani Convention).
- Signing and ratification of outstanding global instruments (MARPOL, London Convention and its Protocol, and the Basel Convention).
- Active engagement at the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation, AHEG-4, and UNEA to secure a negotiating mandate at UNEA-5.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Identification of which priorities and interests should be advanced at the international level on behalf the Pacific island region.
- Understanding how these key interests and demands, based on national and regional circumstances and experience, can be situated and advanced within the international policy landscape.
- Identification of the financial and technical resources needed to implement solutions to the plastic crisis in the Pacific.
- Discussing how a global agreement could facilitate the operationalisation of the IMO Action Plan on Marine Litter, particularly Action 12.

To identify the strategies required to influence future regional and international meetings, in particular: the Pacific Island Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, to be held virtually from 24th – 27th November 2020; and the upcoming meetings of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHEG), including UNEA-5 in February 2021.

ANNEX 1: PANELLIST BIOGRAPHIES

Soseala Saosoa Tinilau is the Director of the Department of Environment and current Acting Assistant Secretary for the Ministry of Public Works, Infrastructure, Environment, Labour, Meteorology & Disaster for the Government of Tuvalu. He received his Master of Science degree in Chemistry at California State University Northridge, CA, USA. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree and Post Graduate degree in Chemistry from the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. He is passionate about protecting the environment and broadening his scientific knowledge to face future challenges, such as the serious issue of climate change and the emerging issue of plastic pollution that is impacting his island nation. You can reach him at butchersn@gmail.com or stinilau@gov.tv.

H.E. Joshua Wycliffe brings with him several years of International Development, Public Service, Environment, Local Government, and Infrastructure expertise. He has spearheaded transformational programs across government functionaries in multiple countries (in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, the Subcontinent and the Asia Pacific). A key success for him has been the modelling and implementation of environmentally and economically resilient community solutions internationally.

Joshua is the Permanent Secretary, for the Ministry of Environment, Government of Fiji and holds a diverse portfolio of Government portfolios. This includes Environment, Local Government and Urban Development. Joshua's previous appointments internationally include working with the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, India, and the SADC. He has led commercialisation of Infrastructure into environmentally friendly portfolio of assets He has also been instrumental in establishing sustainability programs through Private and Public Partnerships (PPP) model. A major success was the development of Microenterprise development and capacity building enterprise and

business units that ensured household economic sustainability, education, and community employment.

Joshua sits on several boards (globally). His passion is to develop climatically and economically resilient community solutions involving newer technologies. Creating and sustaining government options that can foster employment, build capacity and develop innovative outcomes.

Anthony Talouli has been employed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP) as the Pollution Adviser for the last 11 years and is currently Acting Director of Waste Management and Pollution Control. The Pollution Adviser role involves strategic programme and project coordination, implementation and management. Particularly with respect to the management of terrestrial and marine pollution under the overarching framework of the Integrated Waste and Pollution Management Strategy 2016-2025 (Cleaner Pacific 2025) and Pacific Oceans Pollution Prevention Programme (PACPOL) Strategy 2015-2020 in the Waste Management and Pollution Control Programme at SPREP.

Part of this role is managing the marine environment protection aspect of the International Maritime Organization Technical Cooperation Programme in the region as well as being the custodian of the Pacific Regional Marine Spill Contingency Plan (PACPLAN). Both of these roles assist countries in responding to marine oil spills. Another large part of the role is implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Strategy and Action Plan (in draft) as part of the UN Environment Regional Seas and Global Partnership on Marine Litter addressing marine plastics both from marine as well as terrestrial sources. On a day to day basis the role involves providing technical advice, support and assistance to member countries particularly with regards to funding and resourcing that addresses oil, hazardous chemicals, marine debris and plastics, as well as ship sourced pollution. Anthony has an engineering background.²

Trisia Farrelly (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Massey University. Her PhD thesis (completed in 2009), explored the relationship between culture and community-based development in the Boumā National Heritage Park in Fiji, was included on the Dean's List for Exceptional Doctoral Research. In 2015, after teaching at Massey University for seven years, she was awarded a University medal for teaching excellence.

Trisia currently researches the politics involved in the full lifecycle of plastics. She is part of the National Science Challenge (Sustainable Seas). Since September 2017, she has been part of an expert taskforce for the United Nations Environmental Assembly process (Marine Litter and Microplastics). Trisia also is a plastics 'expert panellist and reviewer' for the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor and the Royal Society Te Apārangi.

Other roles include Co-director of Massey University's Political Ecology Research Centre and co-founder and Trustee of the New Zealand Product Stewardship Council (NZPSC). Most recently she has helped establish the newly-formed Aotearoa Plastic Pollution Alliance, a group of plastic pollution researchers based in Aotearoa.³

Admiral Cristiano Aliperta is the permanent representative of Palau to the IMO. He has had a comprehensive maritime career spanning over 38 years service in the Italian Coastguard. He graduated with honors in Economics in Rome before entering the Naval Academy in 1978 directly to the Italian

² See <https://www.spillcon.com/Resources/Speakers/Bios/Anthony%20Talouli.pdf>

³ See <https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/admission/scholarships-bursaries-awards/other-scholarships/sasakawa/young-leaders-fund/sylff-fellow-profiles/trisia-farrelly.cfm>

Coast Guard and where he reached the highest rank of Admiral. He has commanded many important Italian ports and during his career he has presided over numerous SAR activities, pollution, fisheries protection and safety of navigation matters. All these activities brought him in direct contact with the world of seafarers. From 2010-2011 he served as the Head of Department for the Safety of Navigation of the Italian Coast Guard. From 2011 -2015 he held the post of Maritime Attache at the Italian Embassy in London as well as acting as the Alternate Permanent Representative of Italy to the IMO, IMSO and the IOPC Fund. In those years, he participated actively at all IMO committees, specifically focusing on piracy at sea and mass migration. Admiral Aliperta was also part of the Italian drafting team for guidelines for the embarkation of armed guards on board merchant ships. He holds a Master's degree in External Relations and Intelligence. Admiral Aliperta now is retired from the Italian Coast Guard, but continues to work in the maritime sector as a subject expert and adviser.⁴

H.E. Viliami Va'inga Tone became the Permanent Representative of Tonga to the United Nations in 2018. Prior to his this, Mr. Tone was his country's Secretary for Foreign Affairs, from 2013 to 2017, having served in that position from 2007 to 2010, and Lord Privy Seal in the Palace Office from 2011 to 2013. From 2005 to 2006, Mr. Tone served as Acting Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and he sat in Cabinet, Privy Council and Parliament on several occasions. He was Deputy Secretary and Chief of Protocol at the Ministry from 2002 to 2006 and acted as Secretary for Foreign Affairs on several occasions from 2002 to 2004. Also at the Ministry, he served as Principal Assistant Secretary from 2000 to 2001 and as Military Liaison Officer from 1999 to 2000. Mr. Tone holds a Master of Military Studies from the Marine Corps University at Quantico, United States; a Master of Commerce in economics and a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Wollongong University, Australia; and a certificate in diplomatic studies from Oxford University, United Kingdom.⁵

H.E. Laurent Parenté is the Vanuatu Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and chair of the IMO technical cooperation committee. He has been leading work on implementing the IMO Action Plan on Marine Litter and authored a number of submissions to the Marine Environmental Protection Committee. He was also elected Chairman of the International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO) Technical Advisory Committee (AC) in 2017 for the biennium 2017 – 2018.

⁴ See <https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/advisors/admiral-cristiano-aliperta/>

⁵ See <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/bio5102.doc.htm>