

# SPREP submission into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific Region

## Background and Context

### 1. Who we are, what we do and with who

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is the Pacific's regional intergovernmental environment organisation, established under the 1993 Agreement that founded SPREP as an independent organisation. It is charged with promoting cooperation and assisting Members to protect and improve the Pacific environment and ensure sustainable development for present and future generations in harmony with Pacific island cultures. It is also a member of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) first established by Pacific Leaders in 1988.

SPREP has 21 Pacific island Members (American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Marianas, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna) and five metropolitan Members (Australia, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States of America) with direct interests in the region.

SPREP is headquartered in Samoa, with regional presence in Fiji, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. We have approximately 150 staff recruited from around the Pacific region and the world.

SPREP works towards a vision of: "A resilient Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures", as set out in the [SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026](#).<sup>1</sup>The Strategic Plan recognises climate change as the principal concern of SPREP, and emphasises protection of the ocean and the services it provides for Pacific peoples, as a cross-cutting theme relevant to all areas of work.

The SPREP Strategic Plan articulates four regional goals to achieving resilient and sustainable Pacific communities:

**Regional Goal 1** - Pacific people benefit from strengthened resilience to climate change.

**Regional Goal 2** - Pacific people benefit from healthy and resilient island and ocean ecosystems.

**Regional Goal 3** - Pacific people benefit from improved waste management and pollution control.

**Regional Goal 4** - Pacific people and their environment benefit from commitment to and best practice of environmental governance.

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<sup>1</sup> [sprep.org/attachments/Publications/Corporate\\_Documents/strategic-plan-2017-2026.pdf](https://sprep.org/attachments/Publications/Corporate_Documents/strategic-plan-2017-2026.pdf)

Projects and activities under the four regional goals are led by SPREP's technical Programmes of Climate Change Resilience, Island and Ocean Ecosystems, Waste Management and Pollution Control, and Environmental Monitoring and Governance. In providing regional leadership and coordination, technical and policy guidance, and capacity-building and advocacy, SPREP's technical Programmes work closely with Members, and with other [CROP agencies](#), donors and partners, including the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

## 2. Regional Priorities

At the 51st Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, the Leaders endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy) that sets out a long-term approach to working together as a region. This Strategy frames regional cooperation and broader actions around seven key thematic areas. SPREP's work is directly aligned with the Climate Change and Disasters, and Ocean and Environment thematic areas of the 2050 Strategy. SPREP leads or co-leads implementation actions and activities under these two thematic areas, in accordance with its regional mandate and the priorities articulated in the SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026.

SPREP is also uniquely placed to effectively address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, with these themes expressed in the regional goals and priorities of the SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026. Increasingly, SPREP is directing its Programmes and projects to work collaboratively on the issue of the triple planetary crisis, recognising that the crisis disproportionately impacts the Pacific region, and that it requires inclusive, united, multilateral action to identify and achieve impactful solutions.

Caring for nature is part of the Pacific way of life. Pacific Leaders have endorsed regional and national priorities for protecting and managing the Pacific environment and its diverse ecosystems and for improving our relationship with nature. Key priorities for Pacific Island countries relating to environment are clearly documented and outlined in 'The Ways We Work' section of the SPREP Strategic Plan.

Regional priorities should be translated into coordinated and focussed on-ground initiatives by donors and partners and the following provides a specific example.

Healthy Oceans is an overarching vision for the Pacific region which underpins Pacific livelihoods and sustainable development, and is consequently reflected broadly in regional strategies. An example of this is within the PIRT Framework for Nature Conservation where ocean health underpins Objective 2: Integrate environmental and cultural considerations into the goals, processes, and trajectories of economic development in the Pacific, through the key action of *Sustainable and resilient ocean economies*. To support addressing this objective a list of best practices and examples of good initiatives are provided from regional partners. Taking this to the next level, within SPREP two strategic documents produced to support addressing specifics ocean related elements includes the [Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan 2021-2030](#) and the [Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme 2022-2026](#).

## GLOBAL CONTEXT

The Pacific participates in a complex system of global environmental agreements and frameworks, each with varying levels of influence over national and regional policies, and varying extents of implementation within those policies. SPREP supports Pacific Island Members navigate this complex system in partnership with other CROP agencies and partners of the Pacific including for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), where SPREP leads the One CROP, which is a mechanism of CROP agencies and other partners where appropriate, to provide coordination, technical expertise and support for the effective engagement in the international climate change and biodiversity negotiations of Pacific Small Island Developing States.

Another example is in the area of biodiversity. The primary global mechanism for biodiversity conservation is the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) which has adopted the Targets of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Pacific island countries and territories prepare their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to reflect the Goals and Targets of the CBD as well as their national priorities and regional commitments.

Demonstrating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a priority for Pacific island countries and territories, and is closely linked to national programmes of action for nature conservation.

Regional agreements and frameworks are a primary vehicle for regionalism in the Pacific and a key element of regional governance. These generally outline collective approaches to selected regional issues, with the bulk of implementation responsibilities at the national level. Influential regional frameworks include those on climate change and disaster risk management, ocean governance, pollution and hazardous waste, biodiversity and conservation, and political and economic regionalism. It is intended that the implementation of the regional Frameworks be consistent with the delivery of these other regional frameworks and global agreements.

The 2050 Strategy combined with the PIRT Framework for Nature Conservation provides the critical linkage between sustainable economic development and biodiversity together.

### 3. How We Support Pacific Priorities

As a CROP agency SPREP works closely with member governments through their national focal points to deliver against the clearly identified regional priorities. To highlight partnerships and the way the Secretariat works, it also uses the following established mechanisms to provide strategic and effective support to our Members:

- a. Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT)
- b. Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC)
- c. Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (PCCR)
- d. Pacific Meteorological Desk and Partnership (PMDP)
- e. Clean Pacific Roundtable (CPRT)
- f. Regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)

a) Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT)

SPREP is the Permanent Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT). PIRT is a coalition of nature conservation and development organisations, governments, inter-governmental organisations, donor agencies, and community groups, created to increase effective conservation action in the Pacific Islands region. Further details are available here: <https://www.pacificislandsroundtable.com/the-roundtable>

The Roundtable is maintained as a mechanism for promoting, facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the [Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, 2021-2025](#).

PIRT also co-hosts a series of major regional conservation conferences that have met approximately every five years since 1975. It has become the principal gathering of Pacific government agencies, regional organisations, NGOs, community-based organisations, and donor agencies concerned with conservation science and practice in the region. Each Conference endorses a new regional Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, and State of Environment and Conservation report. PIRT co-hosts this conference alongside SPREP and a Pacific Island host country.

The Framework identifies the key regional priorities for action which form the six Strategic Objectives for the Framework. Each of the Strategic Objectives have Action Tracks which reflected the themes of discussion during the 10th Pacific Islands Nature Conference. The Action Tracks were selected based on evidence provided in the [State of Environment and Conservation in the Pacific Islands 2020 report](#). The regional priorities are presented in the six Strategic Objectives are:

- Empower our people to take action for nature conservation, based on our understanding of nature's importance for our cultures, economies, and communities.
- Integrate environmental and cultural considerations into the goals, processes, and trajectories of economic development in the Pacific.
- Identify, conserve, sustainably manage and restore ecosystems, habitats, and priority natural and cultural sites.
- Protect and recover threatened species and preserve genetic diversity, focusing on those of particular ecological, cultural and economic significance.
- Manage and reduce threats to Pacific environments and drivers of biodiversity loss.
- Grow Pacific capacity and partnerships to effectively monitor, govern and finance nature conservation action.

PIRT also adopts mechanisms for making its membership accountable through jointly formulated Principles of Implementation, and its work inclusive of participation by regional and national bodies. These Principles are valuable for use by all donors and partners regardless if they are PIRT members and act as a Code of Conduct.

The guiding Principles of Implementation are:

- Actively recognise, respect and support a Pacific approach to conservation based on sustainable resource use, community property rights and decision-making practices, and local aspirations for development and well-being.
- Respect and encourage national and community partner leadership for all conservation programmes and help strengthen partner capacity to exercise their leadership.
- Align conservation programmes with conservation programmes of national partners.
- Design conservation programmes that are of a scale and budget appropriate to the local context and that long-term strategic planning and resource mobilisation sustains conservation over time.
- Actively support communication, education and public awareness.
- Put systems in place to enable full accountability to and participation of the people affected by conservation programme implementation assisted by well-communicated, fully transparent operations.
- Work with each other to ensure collaborative strategies, agreed priorities and coordination of political engagement to avoid duplication.
- Provide timely, transparent and comprehensive reporting on conservation programmes to the Roundtable.
- Mobilise resources for the implementation of the Framework.

#### **b) Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC)**

The PCCC is a commitment of the Pacific Leaders Meeting (PALM 7) by the Government of Japan to support the regional efforts for tackling climate change in the Pacific. The PCCC was established at SPREP in 2019 through a partnership between the Governments of Japan and Samoa under bilateral grant aid, as the host country of SPREP. The PCCC is uniquely placed as the Regional Centre of Excellence for brokering knowledge, research, innovation, capacity building, learning and training on climate change.

The Government of New Zealand provides funding support of USD\$3 million to fund five PCCC positions. This current grant funding will end in December 2024. The Government of Australia made an investment of AUD\$5 million in 2022 to further operationalise and strengthen the key functions of the PCCC. Key operational activities have since been implemented both under Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Government of Japan in partnership with the Government of Samoa provides technical cooperation projects for Capacity Building since 2019-2022 and further investment for capacity building from March 2024-2027

The Sustainability Plan and key frameworks of the PCCC were endorsed by the 31st SPREP Meeting in 2023. The frameworks are key delivery mechanisms for the PCCC. Each framework has a process for the incubation of Partnership initiatives, engagement process, resource mobilisation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Looking ahead, the PCCC is focussing on stronger partnerships and greater collaboration to mobilise resources:

- For long-term programmatic investment focused on the key functions of the PCCC and driven by Pacific island countries and territories priorities.
- Continue to seek investment and support for the PCCC Innovative Climate Investment Hub to deliver contextual, flexible, predictable and sustainable resources for Pacific island countries and territories that are accessible to both the private sector and public sector.
- Ensure that climate change investment is effective and sustainable.

### **c) Pacific Climate Change Roundtable**

By request of SPREP Members, the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (PCCR) after a 7-year hiatus reconvened in 2024, in recognition of the need for enhanced coordination on climate change.

The PCCR is the regional platform that provides Members with the vehicle to address the adaptation, mitigation, financial and other requirements for building the region's resilience to the adverse impacts of climate change, whilst providing a coordination mechanism that Members can use to amplify their national challenges and successes, advance regional aims and leverage regional opportunities collectively.

The PCCR comprises of both national and climate focal points of the SPREP membership, which collectively agreed that the PCCR would meet biennially, commencing in 2025 to deliver on seven objectives:

- Facilitate engagement and dialogue to draw on the challenges faced, lessons learned, and successes gained in the implementation of national climate change policies and strategies.
- Strengthen regional climate change collaboration by working together to determine and advance Pacific priority thematic areas.
- Provide a platform for countries, donors, and partners to collaborate, to deliver more effective climate finance access for Pacific island countries and territories.
- Exchange knowledge on ongoing, emerging, and innovative solutions, research, technologies, and opportunities from the national context to address climate change issues in the region.
- Ensure enhanced regional cooperation and coordination in relation to relevant climate change events and initiatives, both regionally and globally.
- Work to increase and provide access to human resource capacity, and capabilities in climate change.
- Provide platforms to improve access to technical assistance to address climate change.

#### **d) Pacific Meteorological Desk and Partnership (PMDP)**

The Pacific Meteorological Desk Partnership (PMDP) is a regional coordinated response to meeting weather and climate services development in the Pacific Islands region, which is hosted at SPREP. Endorsed at the 21st SPREP Meeting in 2011 to renew a Pacific Island regional mechanism urgently needed to develop capacity and advance the sustainability of weather and climate services in Pacific Islands. The PMDP serves as the regional weather and climate services coordination mechanism managed by SPREP and WMO to deliver a regionally coordinated effort to service SPREP Members needs in weather and climate services.

The Pacific Meteorological Desk Partnership consists of the Pac Met Desk and a Partners Component.

##### The Pac Met Desk

This is made up of the Apia-based Secretariats of SPREP and the WMO working in close collaboration, and represents two key coordination elements:

- Overall coordination and leadership in terms of linking national and regional priority needs
- Overall reporting responsibility to the SPREP Meeting and the Pacific Meteorological Council, including monitoring and evaluation.

##### The Partners Component

This is the collective of technical expert institutions that form the key technical expertise that is delivered to build the capacity of Pacific NMS. Key SPREP partners institutions include the Pacific Community (SPC), University of the South Pacific (USP), US NOAA, Australian Bureau of Meteorology, New Zealand MetService and NIWA, JMA, JICA, Meteo-France, APCC, KMA, FMI, among others.

The goal and objectives of the Partnership is to improve regional coordination, advancing and sustaining the delivery of weather, climate and related services for the protection of life and property of Pacific island communities.

Other core objectives are:

- coordination of PICT national and regional priority needs with regard to weather and climate services development
- joint planning and design of technical projects and programmes for delivery by technical agencies to build on complementation and replication of efforts, and minimising inefficient resource use
- governance relationship through Pacific Meteorological Council.

A key project that SPREP through the Pacific Met Desk will support is the Weather Ready Pacific, which was endorsed by Pacific Leaders in 2021 and is a Pacific Partnership for Prosperity priority and Regional Collective Action under the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan endorsed by Pacific

Leaders in 2023. Weather Ready an initiative developed and led by the PMC aims to strengthen the Pacific region's resilience to the impacts of severe weather events, which the Government of Australia has strongly committed to with an investment of AUD\$ 30 million made in 2023.

#### **e) Clean Pacific Roundtable**

The inaugural Clean Pacific Roundtable was held in 2016 and successfully followed by the second Roundtable hosted at the Pacific Islands Forum in 2018. As a direct result of the second Roundtable, the 49th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Communique reaffirmed Leaders' commitment to eliminate marine litter; recognised the urgency of implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan and stated that waste is a critical issue for the Blue Pacific.

Since then, the role of the Clean Pacific Roundtable has grown in recognition of the complex challenges of the waste sector in the Pacific, and urgency surrounding meeting these challenges for effective planning, coordination and financing for a clean environment, resilient ocean, and enabling healthy communities.

The Roundtable membership is broad and consists of both national and waste focal points of the SPREP membership, as well as stakeholders beyond the public sector, that includes waste and environmental practitioners, development partners, private sector, community, NGOs, academic and research institutions, from within and beyond the Pacific region.

The CPRT will continue to provide a vehicle to disseminate outcomes, promote regional collaboration and resource complementarity, and expand networking opportunities to assist Pacific Island countries and territories in the delivery of safe and sustainable waste management practices and to prevent pollution-related issues that impact the health of the ocean and communities within the region.

The Roundtable provides a vehicle for high-level agreement and action to provide a regional position on waste management to other regional and international Fora that intersect with waste management and the impact of waste on the environment.

#### **f) Regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)**

SPREP is the Secretariat of the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, 1986, and its related Protocols. The Convention is also known as the Noumea Convention and it is the Pacific region component of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme launched in 1972. The Noumea Convention is a comprehensive umbrella agreement for the protection, management and development of the marine and coastal environment of the Pacific region. There are twelve Parties to the Noumea Convention.

The Noumea Protocols adopted in 1986 entered into force in 1990. The Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the South Pacific Region by Dumping and the Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution Emergencies in the South Pacific Region.

SPREP is also the Secretariat for the Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement



and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region, 2001. The Convention is also known as the Waigani Convention and modeled on the Basel Convention as the region's implementing mechanism of the international hazardous waste control regime. The Waigani Convention covers radioactive wastes and its scope of coverage includes each Party's exclusive economic zone (EEZs). In addition, the Waigani Convention is strongly related to, and linked to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and other matters, 1972 (London Convention). There are thirteen Parties to the Waigani Convention.

In addition to regional MEAs, SPREP supports Members in the implementation of Global MEAs related to biodiversity, waste and chemicals.

## 4. Recommendations

Drawing on the above context, this submission outlines several recommendations for strengthening Australia-Pacific engagement.

### 4.1 Utilise and strengthen existing regional mechanisms

The Pacific islands have strong existing mechanisms of which CROP agencies and their associated roundtables, regional conventions, frameworks, strategies and initiatives are key elements.

It is recommended that the Australian Government:

- i) work within, or enhance established mechanisms, where they exist;
- ii) investigate options to enhance capacity of existing regional support mechanisms so they are able to continue and enhance support to PICs. For example, while addressing capacity needs of PICS it is also important to consider capacity gaps within the CROP agencies who play a key role in coordinating and delivering initiatives and supporting PICS. This was highlighted by SPREP and SPC Director Generals during the Partnership Dialogue of the 2023 SPREP Members meeting.
- iii) need to develop sustainable financing strategies to ensure continuity of existing regional mechanisms. Regional conventions have the potential to provide the legal basis and platform for regional implementation of contemporary global measures and to support national mechanisms through delivery of assistance in the development of policy and legal instruments.

Relating to the climate change and the environment existing mechanisms that should be utilised for the Pacific islands region include:

- a. Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT)
- b. Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC)
- c. Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (PCCR)
- d. Pacific Meteorological Desk and Partnership (Pac Met Desk)
- e. Clean Pacific Roundtable (CPRT)

- f. the Conventions - Secretariat for Waigani and Noumea
- g. Global Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements

## 4.2 Fit for purpose funding

It is recommended that resourcing for longevity be a key goal of support to the Pacific. Environment and resilience initiatives must be adequately and appropriately resourced over time, by planning for the financial, social, organisational and cultural components of project longevity.

For example, global and regional sources of finance targeted at environment and nature conservation are far smaller than those for broader sustainability initiatives, and is insufficient to meet the requirements of conservation within the region.

Environment and biodiversity conservation needs to be supported from fit for purpose funding, revenue generating schemes and new funding sources as called for in the 2050 Regional Strategy. The PIRT Strategy and other key strategic documents provide strategic objectives for achieving this through co-designed, targeted, appropriately scaled, and timely initiatives which underpin economic sustainable development.

The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas outlines a suite of best practices and actions.

## 4.3 Strengthen interlinkages

The Triple Planetary Crisis cannot be ignored and was recently globally recognised by leaders, and reflects the interlinkage of the three main of threats currently faced by humanity, being climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The Triple Planetary Crisis is hitting the Pacific and this raises the importance of the regional strategies outlined in the body of this document.

Environment conservation cannot be viewed in isolation, and underpins sustainable development and climate change resilience. It is critical to bridge the gap between climate change and environment and not treat these elements as separate challenges as can happen through a donor lense.

Challenges faced by the Pacific including climate change cannot be addressed without a holistic view that is underpinned by biodiversity conservation, environmental management, including waste management and pollution control, and ensuring the livelihoods of Pacific communities.

Similarly sustainable development cannot be achieved without ensuring a strong foundation built of environmental and social elements.

## 4.4 Strengthen partnerships

There is an ongoing need to strengthen partnerships and to create 'real partnerships'. This means co-design, sustainable ongoing funding, using existing regional architecture and drawing on Pacific led priorities. Partnership also need to build the capacity of the supporting agencies (eg. CROP) along with that of Pacific countries.

A recommendation is to apply the Pacific Principles for Conservation Implementation which constitute a code of conduct for all nature conservation initiatives within the Pacific region, and

apply to all stakeholders. Although embedded in the environment realm, these Principles can be applied across all sectors of aid and donor support.

The Principles of Conservation Implementation sit within the regionally endorsed Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation. The Principles cover:

- Community rights
- Conservation from Pacific perspectives
- Ownership of conservation programmes
- Resourcing for longevity
- Good governance and accountability
- Coordination and collaboration
- Growing Pacific capacity
- Reinforcing resilience

#### 4.5 Integrate environmental and cultural considerations into the goals, processes, and trajectories of economic development in the Pacific.

Pacific habitats and species are diverse. Local knowledge matters, and community connections are vital for success. Management must reflect that.

*The above are a small selection of recommendations. More guidance, recommendations and best practice examples already exist and can be found within the existing regional Frameworks and documents covered in the body of this submission including the Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas lists challenges, needs and provides best practice examples.*

SPREP values Australia's support to the region and welcomes further opportunities to discuss promoting cooperation and assisting our Pacific Members to protect and improve the Pacific environment and ensure sustainable development for present and future generations in harmony with Pacific island cultures.