



**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
SDG 14 AND INTERLINKAGES WITH OTHER SDG'S – LIFE
BELOW WATER**

**Statement Issued by
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SDG 14 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Life below water (Building on the Ocean Conference, what actions and partnerships can build synergies among COVID-19 recovery, economic development and ocean health? How best can we use the momentum from the Ocean Conference to strengthen the science - policy interface to support sustainable ocean management?)

1. I thank you for this opportunity to deliver remarks by the Delegation of Fiji, on SDG 14 “Life below Water” and on the interlinkages with other SDG’s. Fiji aligns itself with the Statement of Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS).

2. First, I wish to stress the fundamental importance of the theme for this HLPF “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
3. SDG 14 is by far one of the most transformative and one of the most catalytic of all SDG’s. The Ocean is the largest and most powerful gift of our natural world in helping us to fight climate change. All SDGs depend on us getting the World back onto. 1.5 C pathway. If we fail SDG 14, we fail humanity. If we fail SDG 14, we fail our future generations.
4. Fiji and Pacific Island Forum Members share some 40 percent of the total Exclusive Economic Zone globally. By protecting and managing their Ocean, they make an outsized contribution to keeping global warming to below 1.5 degree Celsius. Fiji joins its Pacific vuvale in urging the World do far more to secure the 1.5C target. If we overshoot the 1.5 target; achieving the SDG’s will become too steep a climb for all of us. Our NDC’s need to become blue. They need to become crystal clear blue and not murky blue in their blue commitments. We look forward to COP 27 for a quantum leap in Blue Commitments.
5. The Ocean Conference that was held in Lisbon and concluded a little over a week ago was an urgent call to accelerate action towards SDG 14. The Ocean has historically been a neglected area. Lisbon helped to change that in a fundamental way. As co-chair of the First Ocean

Conference, I convey my sincere thanks to Portugal and Kenya for creating a vibrant platform of solutions: solutions on capacity; solutions on science; solutions on financing to take forward the conservation and protection of our Ocean to a much higher level.

6. UNCLOS – the Constitution of our seas acknowledges that a just and equitable economic order must take into account the interests and needs of humankind as a whole and in particular, the special interests of developing countries both coastal and landlocked. Developing countries have not benefitted from the high seas and its resources in the same manner that developed countries have in their economic development. A blue economic divide must not become a new flashpoint for a growing divide between the Global North and the Global South.
7. The international system needs to acknowledge the importance of investments via grant and highly concessionary financing; capacity building that is tailored to developing countries and the transfer of marine technology to enable small island developing states to transition from being spectators to active participants in the ocean space on the high seas.
8. To tackle the state of ocean health and ocean governance, there is a need to involve stakeholders and non-governmental actors from the Global South who are actively involved in ocean affairs and

management at all level including local, regional and international level. We must enhance the involvement of indigenous peoples' and local communities in all processes that relate to ocean health and governance. We have said to the Lisbon Conference; “do the ocean science and research with us – not for us”.

9. In the Pacific, we significantly benefit from two regional organizations namely the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) that is committed to strengthening national capacity and regional solidarity to ensure Member States from the Pacific region, are effectively able to manage, control and develop their tuna fisheries now and in the future. There is a larger body, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) that is the central decision-making body for management of tuna fishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean with a membership of 32 members, drawing members from the Pacific region and distant water fishing nations. All distant fishing water countries are encouraged to become members of regional bodies that govern regional fisheries and participate in regional fisheries governance and management processes. Done right, the Pacific can continue to keep tuna fisheries management within code green – a healthy code. Don't wrong, we will also risk code red - the collapse of fisheries; and heightened food insecurity globally.

10. Heavily subsidized commercial fishing that often employ detrimental fishing methods such as bottom trawling have a devastating impact on marine habitats, including coral reef, seagrass, and seabed communities. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and overfishing threaten fish stocks, harm marine eco-systems, deprive coastal states with the right to benefit economically from their ocean resources.
11. Mr. President, the Western and Pacific Ocean accounts for more than 54 per cent of the world's tuna catch making tuna not only a key economic resource for development of the region but a vital source of food security for the world. Fiji and the Blue Pacific will continue to play a significant role in supporting global food security.
12. To raise international attention on aquatic food (blue foods), Fiji will work with like-minded countries including Iceland, Kenya and others to support the development of a highly sustainable model of blue food. We look forward to other coastal countries joining the Blue Foods Coalition.
13. Excellencies, the financial loss arising from tuna migration in the Pacific arising from warming oceans is growing. The loss of tuna income is already equivalent to the total grant aid being made available to the small island states of this region.

14. Beyond global warming, nearly every 1 out of 4 tuna sold on international markets is still procured illegally from the Blue Pacific. IUU on this scale is only possible with support of countries. That is why in reporting on SDG 14, it is essential that countries share and showcase their efforts at curtailing IUU in distant waters. We all will have a lot to learn from this.
15. But IUU on this scale is possible because of one other important factor. The unhealthy subsidies made available by large and small fishing nations enables fleets and industry to fish legally and illegally in distant waters. The IUU aspect of the global tuna and fisheries industry is intrinsically linked to the fossil fuel industry. Harmful fossil fuel subsidies that are destructive to both our climate and to our fisheries must end. Member states need to report on measures they are undertaking to phase out harmful fisheries subsidies. We welcome the progress at the WTO recently. Fiji urges member states to report on the pace and on their commitment to transitioning their tuna fleets to more sustainable energy via the NDC mechanism under the IPCC process; and via the VNR's.
16. Fiji and Pacific as stewards of some 40 percent of the World's EEZ. They are important stakeholders in the negotiations on a treaty for management and protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions. The fifth BBNJ will be held in August - next month. It is our hope that the BBNJ Conference will conclude and deliver a strong treaty. For ocean states, a fair access and benefit sharing

mechanism (ABS Mechanism) is crucial for both equity and inclusiveness. Much of the developments in marine genetics is informed by traditional knowledge of oceans and its biodiversity by coastal communities. A new BBNJ implementing agreement must empower indigenous and coastal communities. It must make available to adjacent states knowledge about marine genetics derived from the science on oceans beyond their maritime boundaries. Fiji looks forward to working with all member states in satisfactorily concluding the BBNJ and therefore securing biodiversity on the high seas.

17. Excellencies, we recognize how climate change adversely affects the ocean. The IPCC now provides for a pathway forward on climate-ocean nexus. Fiji has been arguing that the impact of climate change on sea-level rise is accelerating - threatening communities across the Pacific and now whole states. Climate change has already uprooted entire communities across Fiji. Relocation of communities is well underway in Fiji driven largely through our domestic revenues. Fiji looks forward to member states sharing through their VNR' their own efforts at preserving livelihoods for coastal communities being relocated as a result of sea level rise.

18. We look as well to learn from the breath of nature-based solutions and their financing in helping protect communities and their livelihoods from sea level rise.

19. Mr. President, Fiji's Hon Prime Minister outlined the boldest commitments yet at the Lisbon Ocean Conference. This included Fiji's commitments to

- (i) Creating 100,000 new jobs in a sustainable blue economy by the end of the decade.
- (ii) Creating 15,000 jobs via a job for nature program focussed on young, women and disadvantaged groups.
- (iii) A continued moratorium on sea bed mining in Fijian waters and commitment to work with member states for a broader global moratorium.
- (iv) A call for Japan to cease all efforts to discharge radioactive Fukushima waters into the Pacific.
- (v) A commitment to expand MPA's to at least 30 percent by 2030 within a highly managed approach to 100 percent of our ocean.

- (vi) A commitment to expand protection of maritime communities through Nature Based solutions.
- (vii) A commitment to apply integrated solutions from sustainable agriculture, to waste management to renewable energy and to coral reef protection in building the first generation of “Blue Towns”.
- (viii) Applying innovative financial solutions through combination of grant finance, impact investment, philanthropy and blue bonds to help to expand a highly sustainable model of blue economy.
- (ix) Repurposing its World-class tourism sector to focus on sustainability and conservation.

20. In supporting these efforts, we welcome substantive partnerships. For this we reiterate

- (i) Work with us and with our national and regional institutions in building and expanding ocean science and knowledge. We will be both better off as a result.
- (ii) Work with us in co-creating solutions rather than crafting them for us.

- (iii) Work with us collaboratively in shaping and innovating on financial solutions for driving our sustainable blue ambitions and programs.

21. There is no dearth of solutions on SDG 14. There is no shortage of ambition and political will by Fiji to continue to both lead and make its outsized contribution.

22. This week the Leaders of the Blue Pacific meet in Suva where they are expected to lift their Blue Ambition even higher. But in doing so, the Pacific Islands Forum is likely to adopt a precautionary approach to protecting the regions biodiversity, environment, and resources from exploitation, degradation, nuclear contamination, waste, pollution, and health threats.

23. Mr President, and to conclude, allow me to paraphrase one of the greatest scholars from the Blue Pacific, the late Professor Epeli Hau'ofa who said that “just as the sea is an open and ever flowing reality, our BluePacific identity transcends all forms of insularity; it is openly searching, inventive and welcoming”. May the BluePacific remain open and welcoming to all to choose to play by accepted international norms within a spirit of genuine partnership and respectful of the concerns and aspirations of people across our vast Blue Continent.

24. At HLPF 2022, our attention should rightly shift to the question of international solidarity. In saving the World's Ocean, solidarity is our enlightened mutual self-interest.

I thank you.
