



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
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GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Opening remarks at the International Seabed Authority side-event
to the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable
Development

13 JULY 2021

Kia Orana Excellency's, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Warm greetings from the Government and people of the Cook Islands here in the heart of the Pacific Ocean.

COVID-19 continues to dominate the world's attention, the impacts have been severe and will be long lasting. In the Cook Islands we have been fortunate, so far, to remain COVID free. Although, like many other nations, we experienced an unprecedented economic contraction, looking ahead we are focused on our recovery and improving our resilience.

I strongly believe that the sustainable and responsible development of seabed minerals has the potential to make a significant contribution over the coming years to our, and other nations, social, environmental and economic wellbeing.

On that note, it is my great pleasure to deliver the opening remarks to this high-level event which provides a timely platform to discuss how, together, we can ensure the sustainable management and stewardship of the deep seabed and its resources for the benefit of all humanity.

Contribution to SDGs

Firstly, I would like to touch on the contribution that seabed minerals can make to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and our experience in the Cook Islands.

For participating States, the sustainable development of seabed minerals can significantly contribute to poverty reduction and enhanced economic growth as set out in SDG's 1 and 8.

In the Cook Islands, revenue from seabed minerals not only offers the opportunity for long-lasting socio-economic development but also the possibility to expand our economy's resource base and in so doing, improve our economic resilience that will help protect us from future shocks.

Developing our seabed resources also provides the opportunity to invest in our people and in particular our youth.

An example of this is engineer Eusenio Fatialofa, a Cook Islands national, who has participated in a number of at-sea expeditions in the Area. These experiences provide a wealth of knowledge, skills, and opportunity.

This is a priority for my government, and we are committed to empowering our people by providing more opportunities for training, education, and decent employment in an emerging and high-tech sector.

Transition to low-carbon society

As the leader of a pacific nation I am acutely aware of the threat that climate change poses and the urgent action that must be taken to combat it.

The global response to this threat has been a major shift towards a low carbon society based on renewable energy and technology.

This is expected to drive a substantial increase in demand for minerals and metals critical to the shift, many of which can be found on the seabed. These resources can contribute significantly towards the clean energy goal of SDG7 however they must be developed responsibly and sustainably if they are to play a major role in the transition.

Environmental management

Conserving life below the water is the focus of SDG 14. We all benefit from maintaining biodiversity and protecting habitats from over exploitation, particularly for future generations.

We know that the development of seabed minerals will have an impact on the environment but these impacts can be reduced and managed sustainably.

This is where the role of global institutions and international cooperation becomes vitally important. I want to commend the work being done by the Authority in ensuring that we progress down this path by taking a precautionary approach.

Stewardship

We, in the Cook Islands are a people of the ocean, we take its stewardship and management seriously. What we call our *Moana Nui o Kiva*, is our lifeblood. It provides us with a source of food, income, and it is part of our identity.

Collectively, through the Authority we have the opportunity, before mining begins, to put in place the regulatory and governance frameworks needed to ensure development is undertaken sustainably and responsibly for the benefit of all humanity. For me and my government this is a priority, and I look forward to our contribution to that.

In closing, I wish to thank the Secretary General of the International Seabed Authority, His Excellency Michael Lodge, for the diligent and inspiring work carried out by the Authority in implementing the Convention and its contribution towards achieving the SDGs.

God bless and Kia Manuia