

Item 10: Oral reports delivered by Facilitators and OEWG Chair Joint Statement on IWG Environment

21 July 2023

Joint Statement delivered by Alex Herman (Cook Islands) on behalf of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Thank you Mr. President for allowing my delegation to take the floor.

We are honoured to deliver this joint statement on behalf of: Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Firstly, it is with great pleasure that we acknowledge and thank Dr Raijeli Taga for her exemplary leadership on this Informal Working Group on the protection and preservation of the marine environment. We are proud, to see a Pacific Islander leading this important work.

As Pacific Islands, we are large ocean states. Our connection to the ocean is deeply rooted in our identity, our traditions, our practices, and our culture. It has and continues to be a source of sustenance to past and present generations, and it will be for our future generations to come.

Regardless of whether we are member States, Coastal States, Sponsoring States, observers, contractors, or stakeholders – we all share a concern to protect our marine environment.

Whilst we may have different positions, we are all united in our commitment to ensure the protection of the ocean and the marine environment.

We are pleased that there is broad consensus on the need for robust, environmentally sound Rules, Regulations and Procedures to be adopted by the Authority. Strong environmental protections are necessary if we are to fulfil our obligations in UNCLOS to ensure effective protection of the marine environment. We all also agree on the importance of promoting and achieving legal certainty for all the actors involved.

We also wish to highlight the importance of marine scientific research for the effective management of the Area and its resources, with special consideration to Pacific Small Island Developing States, through developing programmes for the benefit of developing States and technology with a view to strengthening their research capabilities.

We encourage member States and all stakeholders to support efforts to increase investment in science and technology.

Mr President, we reaffirm our collective commitment towards a strong and comprehensive and fit for purpose regulatory framework to be put in place, based on best available scientific information, and where available relevant traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment before any exploitation of seabed minerals can occur, in line with the precautionary principle and precautionary approach.

Thank you Mr President