

STATEMENT BY OBSERVERS

1. Conservation International (CI)

Conservation International (CI) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the SPREP Annual Meeting. CI's Pacific Islands and Ocean Programme is based in Apia because we value our relationship with SPREP as our most important regional engagement. Our two organisations have many similar goals and objectives and share a commitment to the preservation of natural capital in the Pacific Islands region. CI believes that only by preserving natural systems for the benefit of human well-being can we stem and reverse the tide of degradation of the region's marine and terrestrial environment, with its consequent loss of ecosystem services and reduction in the quality of life for Pacific Islanders. Our projects seek to demonstrate the feasibility of developing innovative and sustainable approaches to the management of both terrestrial and marine environments and then advocating for such approaches to be amplified on a much broader scale by governments, inter-governmental organisations and development agencies.

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with SPREP on several important projects, the most significant of which is the Pacific Oceanscape. In our view, for the Pacific Islands at least, this must be the Decade of the Ocean. As we saw both at Rio+20 and at the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum last week in Rarotonga, oceans issues are receiving global attention like never before. CI has worked closely with SPREP and the Marine Sector Working Group to develop the framework for this globally-significant initiative. During last week's meeting of Pacific Islands Leaders, the Cook Islands committed an area of 1.1 million sq km as its contribution to the Oceanscape. This became the world's largest declaration of a marine protected area; but only briefly, because New Caledonia promptly announced its intention to declare a protected area of some 1.4 million sq km of its Exclusive Economic Zone, much of it within the Coral Sea. CI congratulates the governments of New Caledonia and the Cook Islands on these two outstanding initiatives, which show enlightened self-interest for the benefit of all humanity. In conjunction with Kiribati's Phoenix Islands Protected area, they have placed the Pacific Islands front and centre as the global leaders in protection of the ocean, and the Pacific Oceanscape as the most far-reaching and ambitious international collaboration for conservation that the world has ever seen. We look forward to continuing to work with SPREP, the Marine Sector Working Group and Pacific Islands governments to grow the Oceanscape even further.

But declaring such large areas for conservation is only the first stage – delivering effective management is a significant challenge, especially for poorly-resourced Pacific Islands countries. Liaising with other states which face similar challenges, sharing their experiences and learning from their successes and their mistakes is an important way in which both SPREP and CI can support the development of the individual country-led components of the Pacific Oceanscape. CI has facilitated the membership of the Cook Islands and New Caledonia in the global Big Ocean network, which has already delivered significant benefits.

While marine conservation is a prime focus of the Oceanscape, we must not ignore the urgent conservation needs of the islands strewn across the vast tracts of our ocean. Like SPREP, CI is also engaged in a ridge-to-reef approach in many of our terrestrial projects throughout the region. We are also delighted to have collaborated closely with SPREP in the development of an ecosystem-based approach to climate change adaptation, and to currently have the opportunity to work with SPREP in trialling such an approach in Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands.

CI also acknowledges the leadership shown by SPREP as a coordinating agency for a regional engagement in many important international conventions, in particular the Convention for Biological Diversity. We have collaborated with SPREP in developing a Programme of Work for Protected Areas (PoWPA) for Kiribati, and we are committed to working closely with SPREP, the Government of Kiribati and other partners to deliver improved protection for the islands of Kiribati. In this regard, CI welcomes the announcement made in Rarotonga last week by the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, that the US would collaborate with Kiribati in the development of joint management plans for the Phoenix Islands and Line Islands Ocean Arcs – the largest transboundary commitment to integrated island and ocean management ever announced, and another major achievement of the Pacific Oceanscape.

The presence of invasive alien species can have a devastating impact on not only the ecology of Pacific Islands states, because of its catastrophic consequences for many endemic species, but also the economy, because of their impact on commercial crops. CI is an active part of the SPREP network established to coordinate regional efforts, and through the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund we have supported the efforts of community groups in many different countries in Polynesia and Micronesia to combat the threat of invasive species over the past five years. We are very pleased to see the US National Invasive Species Council represented at this meeting and congratulate them and the countries of Micronesia on the efforts they have made to mitigate the impacts of invasive species. We would welcome new initiatives in the future to bring together the experiences of the numerous skilled conservation practitioners in the region for any collaborative and inclusive undertakings. CI gratefully acknowledges the contribution made just last month by the New Zealand Department of Conservation in providing technical advice for deer, pig and rat control in our demonstration site at Mt Panie on the north-east coast of New Caledonia.

In conclusion, Conservation International wishes to reaffirm its commitment to an ongoing collaboration with SPREP and its member countries in the protection of our shared environment of ocean and islands for the benefit of all its inhabitants; because in the Pacific Islands even more than for most areas of the world, people need Nature to thrive.

2. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), I would like to extend my greetings to the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and to the Members and participants of this 23rd Meeting of Officials and associated meetings which will review achievements and lay the ground for an even better future for SPREP.

Significant for CMS in the region this year, has been the recruitment of Ms Penina Solomona to the position of CMS Pacific Officer. SPREP has contributed a portion of the funding of the post, and is hosting the Officer in its headquarters in Apia. In a short time, Penina has made great strides in raising awareness about CMS along with SPREP and migratory species issues as part of her duties. She is contributing to the implementation of CMS in the region, including the three CMS MOUs for the conservation of Pacific Islands Cetaceans, Dugongs, Sharks and their related Action Plans. The role also contributes to the implementation of the SPREP and CMS Joint Work Programme 2012-2014 and any other activities of common interest in the region, and working in support of the SPREP regional marine species programme. The post is providing significant added value in the region, and CMS and SPREP are currently seeking funds to ensure long-term financing for this position.

As you will be aware, late last year CMS concluded its 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) and the 17th meeting of the CMS Scientific Council. Below are some of the key outcomes of relevance to SPREP:

- Our COP theme on “Ecological Networks” and the need to recognize the link between species and their habitats and, in particular, protect stopover sites and migratory corridors have been recognized. Good publicity was generated by the launch of the publication entitled: [*Living Planet, Connected Planet: Preventing the End of the World’s Wildlife Migrations through Ecological Networks*](#), prepared by the Secretariat and UNEP Grid Arendal.
- Four resolutions focusing on marine species were adopted, such as one dealing with bycatch in gillnet fisheries, which remains a significant threat to seabirds and marine life, requiring additional efforts to ensure that bycatch is reduced to or controlled at levels that do not threaten the conservation status of these species. Another resolution addresses underwater noise, calling for the application of best practice and best available techniques in order to minimize impacts on cetaceans and other biota.
- Marine debris, which threatens seabirds and marine life through ingestion, entanglement and habitat degradation, is another issue which the CMS Parties are pursuing to further the protection and preservation of the marine environment and its living resources. Finally, a comprehensive work programme on cetaceans was developed for the CMS Scientific Council, which seeks to address concerns on a regional basis and use synergies with as well as lend support to ongoing processes and initiatives such as the valuable work done by SPREP and under the CMS Pacific Cetaceans MOU.
- There was also recognition at COP10 of the increasing need to consider climate change, and ensuring the on-going debates on mitigating climate change do not leave behind migratory species.
- A review of invasive alien species will be undertaken, with a special emphasis on islands and the impact of rats, cats and other introduced mammals. The involvement of the SPREP members and the Secretariat would be welcome, given the impact of invasive alien species on seabirds and islands.

Three MOU Signatories meetings of relevance for the region are taking place within the next few months:

- First, back-to-back with this meeting, on 8 September the Signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region will convene for the third time. Many of you will attend this meeting, too, and we are looking forward to progressing this important area of work with you. Our thanks go to SPREP for invaluable logistical and also financial support in order to make this meeting possible.
- From 24-27 September, the 1st Meeting of Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks will be held in Bonn, Germany. This global MOU was concluded in 2010 and fills an important gap in the management of these species under intense human pressure.
- Finally, the 2nd Signatory State Meeting to the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range will take place on 4-5 December 2012 in Manila, Philippines.

Another significant development for CMS this year has been the establishment of a working group of CMS Party states to begin drafting a new CMS Strategic Plan for the period 2015-2023. A final draft strategic plan is to be presented to the next CMS COP11 in 2014. SPREP members are welcome to contribute to the process, along with other CMS partners, and it is important that all stakeholders are included in the CMS strategy to conserve and manage migratory animal species, and encourage full participation in its future implementation. This should help to give the Strategic Plan 2015-2023 the desired high profile and impact as a key instrument for delivering the Convention's mission for migratory species. A dedicated page has been created on the CMS website to provide information as work progresses (www.cms.int).

With those few updates, I wish you a productive and successful meeting, and please be assured that the CMS Secretariat is on hand to work and collaborate with you as required and as necessary.

Notes:

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is an intergovernmental treaty, concluded under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme. It aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species throughout their range. The Convention provides a framework for the development of global or regional Agreements for species that would significantly benefit from international co-operation. For this reason, the Convention encourages species Range States to conclude either legally binding treaties (called Agreements) or legally non-binding instruments.

SPREP and the CMS share common goals in the conservation of ecosystems and the protection of migratory species, which can only be successfully met by enhanced and concerted actions. The Secretariats of CMS and SPREP acknowledge the need to coordinate the migratory species-related activities being developed by each organization in the Pacific Islands Region. These include developments on marine mammals through the Pacific Islands Cetaceans and the Dugong MoUs, and on fish and reptiles through the CMS Sharks MoU.

3. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Thankyou Madame Chair,

The United Nations Environment Programme congratulates SPREP on a well run meeting which has been extremely useful for its partners like the UNEP. UNEP thanks SPREP for another year of close cooperation and looks forward to another shortly to be cemented in our Memorandum of Agreement. We will continue to support the SPREP in its journey to becoming an Implementing Agency of UN Trust funded projects by providing advice if requested. There are similarities between our agencies in this respect since SPREP is, in effect, intending to become both an Implementing and an Executing Agency which creates a particular challenge. In our future similar roles as Implementing Agencies in the region, we would like to take the lead from our MOA, and continue to collaborate and complement each other, rather than compete. The part time co-location of our office on the SPREP campus is highly valued and has benefitted both parties enormously such as facilitating the GEF PAS projects for which SPREP is Executing Agency and UNEP is Implementing Agency. This includes two regional projects such as the ACP MEA capacity building project, and one sub-regional project. UNEP looks forward to developing more projects with SPREP in the next and future Global Environment Facility funding rounds and stands ready to advise SPREP collaborating wider with UN agencies in the Pacific such as through the UN Development Assistance Framework.

Thank you Madame Chair.

4. Birdlife international / Caledonian Ornithology Society

Madam Chair, Mr Director-General and SPREP team, SPREP Officials, Distinguished delegates and representatives of Pacific governments, Observers, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Caledonian Ornithology Society and BirdLife International for giving us the opportunity to attend the 23rd SPREP Meeting with its many debates and topics. I would like to make this statement on behalf of the two organisations that I represent and revisit a theme discussed during the Meeting.

Our planet is faced with environmental problems that jeopardise or destroy the web of life on earth. These include alien invasive species; plants, animals and pathogens have spread beyond their natural range and threaten biodiversity, infrastructures, economies and cultural heritage.

The impacts of alien invasive species are felt more strongly in islands, in particular in the Pacific. Economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts on communities, resources and patrimonial heritage are unfortunately well known and rapidly increasing.

Invasive species currently affect about three quarters of all threatened island bird species. In the Pacific, this means about 350 endemic bird species, such as Cagous in New Caledonia, Petrels in Fiji, Flycatchers in Tahiti, Kakeroris in the Cook Islands, Maos in Samoa, Kakapos in New Zealand, Makiras in the Solomon Islands, Orange-bellied parrots in Australia, ElePaos in Hawaii. The list goes on and all those species are declining due to predation, invasion of ecological niches and spread of disease.

Introduced rats and cats are the two main threats, but pigs, goats, deer, dogs, mongooses, invasive plants and mosquito-borne diseases, such as avian malaria, accelerate their decline.

History tells us that, unless we act, extinction will occur. It is estimated that 65 bird species have disappeared from the planet since 1600, in whole or in part due to alien invasive species.

However, we also know that much can be done to prevent invasions and rehabilitate affected areas. In recent years, the Caledonian Ornithology Society, in partnership with Birdlife International and local stakeholders, has implemented a number of actions to eradicate introduced predators from high biodiversity areas.

In the Northern and Southern provinces, 30 islets are today free from predators and provide safe breeding habitats for more than 15 species of sea birds. In forested areas of *Grande Terre*, we are trialling pig and deer control in the *Massif des Lèvres* IBA. This trial aims to improve the state of the forests for the benefit of bird species (18 endemic species are connected to the forest) and to develop sustainable livelihoods that promote the well-being of local communities. While this only partially reflects the efforts undertaken with other partners, Provinces, Government, *Groupe Espèces Envahissantes*, non-governmental organisations (CI) and local communities, to target alien invasive species in New Caledonia, it is clear that a lot more needs to be done as a matter of urgency.

This challenge was recently addressed during the Pacific Island Forum and again during this Meeting. We must recognise that invasive species management is a priority for the region in terms of awareness-raising and public policies mainstreaming in Pacific countries to improve biosecurity, eradication tools, control methods, and knowledge and information sharing.

This effort must be made in partnership with CROP agencies, NGOs and local communities to protect the cultural and natural heritage of the Pacific and change the pattern of extinction.

With its new 2013-2020 strategy, BirdLife International intends to implement new regional programmes. Invasive species management provides a ready focus for the Pacific region. This year, BirdLife will celebrate its 90th anniversary while the Caledonian Ornithology Society will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2015. Inspired by the awareness-raising campaign that took place during the Year of the Dugong in 2011, we dream of a year that would focus on the wealth and preservation of Pacific birds. Their flight conveys the ideas of freedom, exchange, innovation, discovery and delight in life. Sea birds connect us to one another and their survival depends on the fragile balance between land and sea, over the huge expanse that is the Pacific. Like birds, we depend on this link between land and sea that we must preserve for the future of humanity.

To conclude, I would like to renew my thanks for allowing us to attend this Meeting and to congratulate you all for the actions taken and those that we will undertake in the future.