



Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Oceans and Climate Change Dialogue Statement – Day 1

Thank you chair

Fiji welcomes the engagement on NDCs in this dialogue

We need to be clear that including ocean-based targets in NDCs is not a niche concern or only relevant to specific groups. Both the 1.5°C guardrail and the future of over three billion people who depend on marine ecosystems directly and 8.3bn who benefit from ocean-based services indirectly depend on specific attention to ocean protection needs within NDCs .

The ocean has absorbed 90 percent of excess heat and 29% of CO₂ emitted by the global economy. This service can no longer be relied upon as this vast connected ecosystem degrades. This buffer service that is currently shielding us from the full impact of global warming is degraded year on year. The absorption of heat and carbon causes acidification, coral bleaching, and marine heatwaves.

Global mitigation action and the NDCs that define it cannot discount ecosystem services that are providing this massive yet fragile buffer. We now face the clear and present danger of overshooting 1.5 c. As warming increases and ocean services degrade, we bake in the potential for a rapid accelerated warming scenario further exacerbated by the food security implications of mass coral reef die off.

If our collective NDCs discount this reality they are flawed.

Including ocean-based targets in NDCs means including a further sub-set of additional actions alongside what is traditionally featured in most NDCs.

A typical NDC target might promise a 35 percent reduction in energy-sector emissions by 2035. That is vital. But an ocean target cannot be valued and quantified only through the mitigation lens and the carbon reduction column in the NDC. When Fiji pledges to expand its locally managed marine areas, we are not simply focused on the implications in terms of tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. We are securing fish nurseries for food security, strengthening coastal protection against cyclones, preserving coral reefs that sustain tourism and culture, and upholding the rights of indigenous communities who have stewarded these waters for generations.

This differentiation matters because it shapes how we report, how we finance, and how we track progress. If we force ocean targets into a narrow mitigation framework, we risk leaving core benefits invisible—and unfunded. If we focus solely on using the lens of adaptation, we miss the nuance of how important our oceans are in the regulation of the climate and the management of carbon.

Expanding attention and inclusion of ocean commitments within NDCs is about embracing the fact that climate action must be attentive to the ecosystem services we rely on and that ignoring these services and taking them for granted is a recipe for disaster at scale . The ocean shapes our climate system – we are on the brink of a super El Nino that may unfortunately stand to dramatically reinforce this point over the next years. Furthermore ocean-based action will only be effective if there is a shared commitment across NDCs as what one party commits to in one jurisdiction will be undone if that same action is not upheld by others.

Vinaka vakalevu.