



NEW ZEALAND

Submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on *Dialogue on the Ocean and Climate Change*

May 2020

New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to submit its views relevant to the Dialogue on the Ocean and Climate Change (“Dialogue”) which is to consider how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action in this context (paragraphs 31 and 33 of decision 1/CP.25 refer).

Context

2. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it is unclear when the Dialogue will take place. Given the importance of the issues to New Zealand however, this submission sets out New Zealand’s views on the current context for the Dialogue and how it can successfully examine the role of the UNFCCC in responding to the need for urgent action on the ocean and climate change.

3. There is a growing body of scientific evidence that the serious adverse impacts of climate change on the ocean present a serious problem to Parties in their response to climate change.

4. New Zealand welcomes *the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on the Oceans and Cryosphere (SROCC)* (September 2019). Like the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees, the IPCC SROCC highlights the urgency of prioritizing timely, ambitious and coordinated action to address unprecedented and enduring changes in the oceans and in the cryosphere.

5. The IPCC report finds evidence for urgent action: melting ice, rising seas; more frequent extreme sea level events; changing ocean ecosystems; and declining Arctic sea ice and thawing permafrost. Sea level rise, together with ocean warming and acidification, substantially exacerbates risks to low-lying coastal communities. Some vulnerable communities are expected to face adaptation limits well before the end of this century, even under a low greenhouse gas emission pathway.¹

6. The recent World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) report, *The Global Climate in 2015-2019 (March 2020)*, emphasises that the ocean absorbs around 90 per cent of the heat that is

¹ IPCC Special Report The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate September 2019 www.ipcc.ch/srocc/

trapped in the earth system by rising concentrations of greenhouse gases. Ocean heat content, which is a measure of this heat accumulation, reached record high levels again in 2019. Sea level has increased throughout the altimeter record, but recently sea level has risen at a higher rate due partly to increased melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica. In 2019, the global mean sea level reached its highest value since the beginning of the high-precision altimetry record (January 1993).²

7. The risks that science identifies cannot be ignored. New Zealand is active in managing these risks at home and in our Pacific region.

What is the UNFCCC's role in managing risks to oceans?

8. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which entered into force in 1994, provides a comprehensive regime governing all uses of the oceans and their resources. It enshrines the notion of the need to address holistically the problems that concern the oceans because of their interrelationships. New Zealand considers UNCLOS must guide the work of all UN and other bodies in managing the oceans/climate interface. Under the UNCLOS framework, various competent bodies carry out programmes of work to limit, and protect the ocean from, the adverse effects of climate change. For example, the International Maritime Organisation is now working to implement its Initial Strategy on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships. UNESCO's International Oceanographic Commission is involved in monitoring the role of the ocean in the climate system, providing a major contribution to implementing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on climate change and SDG 14: Life below water. The UN Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea has decided to focus on the topic of "sea level rise and its impacts" for 2020.

9. The appropriate focus for the UNFCCC is mitigation of and adaptation to the impacts of climate change and implications for Parties' implementation of their Convention and Paris Agreement obligations. It is important, however, that efforts to address the ocean and climate change interface within the UNFCCC support the work carried out by other international bodies in performing their respective mandates, and not duplicate them. Where aspects of the oceans/climate interface are already the subject of work by other bodies, the UNFCCC should respect and seek to support this.

New Zealand views on the Dialogue

10. New Zealand attaches considerable importance to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. New Zealand is an island nation with a large maritime domain in a region where countries rely heavily on the ocean for their sustainable development through fisheries, tourism and shipping, and where livelihoods are closely linked to ocean conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources.

11. Water has deep spiritual, social and economic significance for New Zealand's indigenous Māori culture. The ancestors of Māori were ocean going people who over thousands of years

² WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate

traversed the length and breadth of the Pacific Ocean before discovering and settling in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Today the ocean remains important for Māori, not just as a food source for the people but also for its enduring spiritual and whakapapa (genealogical) significance to the culture. New Zealand law goes some way towards acknowledging Māori interests in the ocean through its customary fishing regulations and the fisheries quota management system. Māori maintain kaitiakitanga (guardianship) over their waterways and participate in the development and ongoing management of marine conservation areas and protocols to improve water quality (mauri or life force) and replenish marine life. Māori values with regard to water, the rivers and oceans are also shared by other indigenous cultures e.g. in the Pacific and parts of Asia where traditional values around the use and protection of the maritime culture remain very strong.

12. The potentially devastating effect of climate change on the ocean is one of many drivers for New Zealand's domestic climate change approach. New Zealand is establishing the architecture and institutions to ensure we have clear and stable climate change policies that contribute to the global effort under the Paris Agreement to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to allow New Zealand to prepare for, and adapt to, the effects of climate change. The Zero Carbon Act³ sets a long-term emission reduction target to reduce most of New Zealand's emissions to net zero by 2050⁴.

13. The ocean is also central to the identity, culture, and sustainable development of Tokelau, a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand. Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Members, including New Zealand and Tokelau (as an Associate Member), take seriously their role as custodians, and their responsibility for shared stewardship, of the ocean. This role stems from many centuries of connection with and reliance on the ocean. As home to the majority of the world's low-lying atoll states, the Pacific is likely to be significantly affected by the physical and economic impacts of climate change policies and measures on the ocean.

14. Tokelau's greenhouse gas emissions are included in New Zealand's annual greenhouse gas inventory report to the UNFCCC. Data in the most recent Tokelau GHG Inventory⁵ estimates the total amount of all GHGs from all sources in 2018 for Tokelau was 3.62 kilotonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (kt CO₂-e), contributing approximately 0.005 per cent to New Zealand's gross emissions, well below the significance threshold as defined in paragraph 37(b) of the UNFCCC reporting guidelines for GHG inventories from Annex I Parties. Despite having very low emissions, Tokelau is determined to do its part in reducing GHG emissions by pursuing a decarbonisation development revolving around low carbon, no regrets development policies.

15. At the 50th Pacific Islands Forum in August 2019, New Zealand joined the *Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now*, calling on Parties to the UNFCCC to convene a workshop on the ocean and climate change. The Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion at COP25, co-hosted by

³ Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019

⁴ The target is to reduce net emissions of all greenhouse gases (except biogenic methane) to zero by 2050, and reduce emissions of biogenic methane to 24–47 per cent below 2017 levels by 2050, including to 10 per cent below 2017 levels by 2030.

⁵ Tokelau Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory, 1990-2018, <https://www.tokelau.org.nz/Bulletin/April+2020/TOKELAU+GREENHOUSE+GAS+INVENTORY+1990-2018.html>

New Zealand and Fiji, was used to caucus support for the Oceans Dialogue and we will continue to engage with our Pacific partners in the lead up to the event.

16. We hope the Dialogue will clarify the ways in which the UNFCCC may contribute to accelerating climate-ocean related mitigation and adaptation activity in light of its particular expertise. We suggest a focus on 2 to 3 key questions would be the most useful way to establish the parameters of any further work required in the UNFCCC. These questions might include:

- What additional scientific information is required to support Parties to plan and increase their resilience to the current and projected impacts of climate change on the ocean?
- What technical support can the UNFCCC's constituted and subsidiary bodies contribute to Parties' efforts to plan and increase their resilience to the current and projected impacts of climate change on the ocean?
- What methodological guidance is needed to support Parties to plan and implement policy interventions to reduce the anthropogenic production of greenhouse gases through ocean-based activity?

17. New Zealand recognises there is a need to introduce specialist expertise to enable the UNFCCC to progress our collective understanding on these matters. We suggest consideration be given to basing the Dialogue on expert panel presentations, and to including presentations on how existing UNFCCC work streams can support Parties' oceans/climate work.

18. We recognise the UNFCCC's consideration of these matters is relatively recent. It will be important Parties have an opportunity to reflect on the Dialogue before decisions are taken about next steps. New Zealand recommends Parties to have a further opportunity to make submissions on how the UNFCCC progresses the oceans/climate issue after the Dialogue has taken place.