



*TIAKI MOANA Pacific wisdom and community action for ocean protection

Edited by K. Short, D. Hikuroa, J. Nikitine, and S.Rowland June 2025

























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Contents

Foreword
Introduction by communities
Acronyms / Glossary14
Acknowledgments
Guiding Stars and Lighthouses
Executive Summary20
Introduction
Participants and Representation
Programme Overview31
Thematic Session Outcomes and Synthesis
Connecting Nature, People & Culture in Place
Te Reo o Te Moana: The Voice of the Ocean
Priority Actions45
References

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Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In the preparation of this report, Perplexity AI Pro was used as a drafting and editorial assistance tool to support the synthesis and structuring of content. The AI was employed to refine wording, suggest phrasing, and help streamline sections based on input from the editorial team.

Importantly, AI Data Retention was disabled throughout the process. This means the AI tool did not store, learn from, or retain any of the Tiaki Moana material. All source material, participant insights, and sensitive information were kept secure and confidential, in alignment with Blue Cradle Foundation's data protection principles and respect for contributors' intellectual and cultural property.

The final content of the report reflects the collective voices, experiences, and values shared during the Tiaki Moana Summit & Workshop. Al was used only as a tool to support clarity and structure—not to replace human insight or authorship.



The Blue Cradle Foundation is a non-profit organisation based in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, working across the Pacific to support healthy marine ecosystems through ocean literacy, collaboration, and regeneration.

Founded in 2020, Blue Cradle was created in response to a growing need for inclusive, community-grounded approaches to marine conservation. Our work brings together science, education, storytelling, and local knowledge to build understanding, strengthen capacity, and empower long-term stewardship of the ocean. We work alongside communities, schools, research institutions, governments, and civil society to co-create initiatives that are grounded in place, culture, and relationships.

Blue Cradle's activities range from educational programmes and public outreach to research expeditions and international advocacy. We aim to connect people with ocean science in ways that are accessible, relevant, and actionable. Through our projects, we help bridge knowledge systems, demystify complex marine issues, and support practical, ecosystem-based responses to environmental challenges.

We are proud to contribute to the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and initiatives such as 30x30. Our work is underpinned by a belief that communities are central to ocean protection, and that regional collaboration is essential to sustaining both biodiversity and cultural resilience. Through partnerships based on trust, humility, and shared purpose, Blue Cradle seeks to help restore our connection with the ocean and contribute to a thriving, regenerative marine future—for people and for the planet.



Our society often treats only the symptoms, not the root causes. While regular restrictions like MPAs address biodiversity erosion, OECMs offer a way to consider all the underlying problems that contribute to that erosion"

Ihirau Piton Young Pacific Leader, French Polynesia.



Foreword

Patrick Rochette

Rahui Center

We are the Pacific. We are the ocean. In all its strength and diversity. Strengthened by our singularities, we share a common bond.

We are alone, each on our own island. But together. Connected by the ocean. It is together, in this sea of islands, as Epeli Hau'ofa said, that we learn to survive and master the art of resilience. Inspired by the knowledge and practices inherited from our tupuna - our ancestors - we preserve and enhance our natural heritage. We share and pass on our knowledge and heritage to our children so that, today and tomorrow, we can co-construct a world of solutions to new challenges. Solutions that respect our values, our identities, our lives, intimately linked to the ocean.

The Tiaki Moana has brought us together. I don't know if the OECM is a good thing for the Pacific. What are they, after all? I do know, however, that we are already doing something for the ocean. Each in our own way, but all driven by the desire to preserve our lifestyles shaped by the ocean. We preserve it because it's a question of survival.

During these few days, we shared our stories, our fears, our legends, our songs, our practices. We have seen our differences and our commonalities. We urgently need to share these singular visions across the seas.

On the occasion of the UNOC, may our voices not only be heard, but listened to. May the wisdom of our elders and the determination of our children be a source of inspiration. May the contribution of Pacific peoples to a resilient ocean be recognized. May we be trusted and allowed to express our sovereignty for the good of the ocean and our peoples.

Patrick Rochette





Introduction by communities

Teva I Uta

la ora na.

The community of Teva I Uta was deeply moved and honoured to have welcomed Blue Cradle and the Young Pacific Leaders during a cultural gathering marked by deep respect, exchange, and sharing.

This ocean that connects us all is facing climate change, pollution, and overexploitation.

In the face of these challenges, these young Pacific leaders are rising to carry our voices.

Seeing these youth unite to defend our ocean gave us renewed courage and hope.

Together with our whole community, we wish to support them with all the mana of our land and ocean.

Fa'aitoito (Stay strong)

la ora na,

Te oaoa nei te Amuitahiraa no Teva I Uta,na roto i te aàu tae e te hanahana,i te fârii raa ia outou, Blue Cradle e te Youngs Pacific Leaders,i roto i te farereiraa iho tumu,te iteraa hia te auraro,te àittauiraa e te tauàraa parau,ua ite hia te mana puai i roto ia tatou.

Teie moana ûriûri ô tei taàti ia tatou i mua i te fifi o te àhuraa no te reva,no roto mai i te viivii e te hûa nane raa hia te faufaa o teie moana.

I mua i teie mau iho tupu nounou,ua hinaaoro teie mau Toa Ui-api no Patitifa no te paruru i teie moana ûriûri,ua ô faahou mai te faaitoito raa e te tiaituru raa.

No reira,ia tià amui anaé tatou no te aratai i teie mau Toa Ui-api no Patitifa,mâ te Mana o to tatou fenua,e te mana o to tatou Moana nui a Hiva.

Faaitoito Clément Vergnhes Deputy Mayor of the Commune of Teva I Uta





Mo'orea

Ua ma'iti 'outou i te faa nō 'Ōpūnohu 'ei vāhi rururaa, faanahoraa tei orahia mai e tō mātou mau tupuna a hō'ē tauatini matahiti i teie nei. I te 'uputa o te fare o te fee piihia Taumata fee faatupu hau, tāpa'o faufaa roa nō te mou'a ra o Rotui, ua taahi 'outou i ni'a i te taahiraa o te mau 'āti i ruru e i 'ohipa 'āmui ia vai noa te hau e te faatura i Pōrīnetia nei.

Te mea taa 'ē i te tahi atu mau nūnaa, ua riro te mau nūnaa nō Pātitifā 'ei mau 'ihitai mātāmua tei fano nā tua, tei haafaufaa i te 'ohipa faa'apu nā te mau fenua ātea e te mo'emo'e i roto i te moana nui a hiva o te ao nei, e ua riro ato'a 'ei mau taata mātāmua tei māramarama i te faufaa o te pāruru hope roa i te mau rahu taa 'ē, e tano rā e haapāutuutu.

Ua 'ite mātou i tō 'outou mata 'ānapa i te 'ite o tō mātou mau tupuna, e ua 'ite mātou i te mōrī o te tahi ananahi maita'i. Mai te tumu 'uru, e tītauhia ia 'outou ia rave i te mau a'a paari ia tupu 'aere te mau 'āmaa, ia pāpū te pārururaa e te hoturaa tau roa nō tā tātou mau tamarii, e te mau tamarii o tā tātou mau tamarii.

E tautooraa paari mau ā tā 'outou e rave nei, tera rā tei muri ia 'outou te mau nūnaa nō Pātitifā e tei ia 'outou ato'a. E faarii-poupouā-hia 'outou i te fenua nei mā tō 'ā'au, e a ti'aturi ā ia mātou i tō Moorea nō te tauturu ia 'outou, hōro'a i te pūai e nō te arata'i ia 'outou.

E fenua teie nō tātou, e moana teie nō tātou, e hōro'a teie nā tā tātou mau tamarii e nō te ao tā'āto'a.

This year, you have chosen the valley of Opunohu as your gathering place, as our ancestors did a thousand years ago. At the threshold of the house of the octopus, Taumata fee faatupu hau, the legendary guardian of Mount Rotui, you have walked in the footsteps of the clans who once gathered here, working hand in hand to uphold peace and respect across Polynesia.

Long before other civilizations, the peoples of the Pacific were the first to dare the open ocean, to cultivate the land on islands scattered across the world's greatest expanse of water, and among the first to grasp the urgent need to protect these unique yet fragile ecosystems.

In your eyes, we saw the brilliance of our tupuna, the wisdom of our ancestors, and the glimmer of a brighter tomorrow. Like the tumu 'uru, the breadfruit tree, you will need strong roots to spread your branches, so that you may bring shelter and prosperity to our children, and to the children of their children.

Your task is great, but the peoples of the Pacific stand behind you, beside you. You will always be welcomed on this land with kindness, and you can always count on Moorea to support you, to uplift you, and to guide your way.

This land is ours. This ocean is ours. It is the legacy we shall pass on to our children, and to all humankind.

Evans Haumani Mayor of the Commune of Mo'orea-Maiao





Ra'iātea

The commune of Taputapuātea had the immense honour and pride of welcoming the Blue Cradle Foundation and hosting a ceremony in its name on the marae of Taputapuātea, an emblematic site of Pacific culture and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

This special moment was a testament to our deep commitment to the ocean, the land, and the environment — the true foundations of our identity and our shared responsibility.

Together with my municipal council, we had the privilege of sharing the essential values that guide our daily work: to protect, preserve, and pass on. In the face of climate challenges threatening our islands, it is vital that we act together, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

It is with this conviction that we stand alongside Blue Cradle and Pacific nations to defend our territories and raise the voice of our island communities. The United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) offers a crucial opportunity to assert our collective responsibility and demand bold action for the protection of the Pacific Ocean, our source of life and culture.

Through this partnership, we affirm our commitment to work hand in hand, to honour ancestral knowledge, and to build a sustainable future where environmental protection remains an absolute priority.

Taputapuātea is proud to contribute alongside Blue Cradle and all those working for a thriving and protected Pacific.

Thomas Moutame Mayor of the Commune of Taputapuātea





Foreword

President of French Polynesia

It was a tremendous honor to host the Tiaki Moana Summit from 24–27 March 2025 in French Polynesia, at the heart of one of the world's vastest and most precious oceans. More than just an event, it was an offering from our oceanic heart to our Pacific brothers and sisters.

Tiaki Moana — "to protect the ocean" — carries a profound message. In both Māori and Tahitian, it conveys the ideas of guardianship and hope. It symbolizes our shared commitment to preserving the ocean for future generations.

The ocean is our origin, our path, our memory. It is our liquid, life-giving, and sacred land. As President and a child of this fenua, I feel a deep responsibility to defend it, honor it, and pass it on.

The workshops in Mo'orea, the summit at the Presidency, and the visit to Taputapuātea in Ra'iātea connected science, culture, and civic engagement. Like the wheke, the octopus whose arms extend in all directions, our peoples have woven a living network of cooperation, knowledge, and action.

Our actions speak for themselves: the community rahui, the Tainui Atea managed marine area, the commitments made in the Papeete Declaration, and those shared ahead of the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice. All reflect a clear will: to build sustainable ocean management grounded in communities, Indigenous knowledge, and regional cooperation.

On this occasion, French Polynesia reaffirms five key priorities:

- Protect coral reefs and lagoons;
- Strengthen research on the deep sea;
- Promote community-based marine management;
- Integrate the ocean into our sustainable innovation strategy;
- Develop marine renewable energy.

I thank all participants, especially our young leaders, who carry bold solutions. Together, let us build a shared, living, and respected ocean future.

Mauruuru roa Moetai Brotherson



Foreword

Blue Cradle Foundation

Tiaki Moana began with a simple idea: what if we could bring people together from across the Pacific — communities, Indigenous leaders, scientists, youth, and policymakers — to co-design the future of marine protection? And, what if we could invite those leaders that are on-the-ground, doing the work in their communities, to share their voices on the future of the Moana.

In March 2025, that vision became real. Over 200 participants from 22 Pacific nations gathered in French Polynesia for a regional summit and workshop rooted in dialogue, equity, and connection. Not top-down, but bottom-up. Not to repeat what's been done, but to ask: how do we protect the ocean in ways that honour culture, community, and justice?

Meeting the urgency of the ocean's decline takes more than data and policy. It takes trust, humility, and collaboration. It takes creativity and pragmatism. Art, spirit, and ethics must stand alongside science and governance. We must ask not only how we act, but why, and for whom.

At Blue Cradle, we believe that community leadership, intergenerational learning, and regional solidarity are essential to a regenerative ocean future. Tiaki Moana was never just an event — it was a spark. A moment of connection and reflection that continues to grow as a movement for the future of our children and the generations to come.

We're a small team with a big vision. To everyone who showed up with honesty, creativity, and heart — thank you.

James Nikitine
Founder & CEO, Blue Cradle Foundation

Sam Rowland Chair, Blue Cradle Foundation





James Nikitine



Sam Rowland

Summit Day at the Presidential Palace welcomed by President of French Polynesia Moetai Brotherson



In Ra'iātea - bringing nature and culture together for reconnection and immersion



Acronyms/Glossary

Acronyms

Al	Artificial Intelligence		
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity		
COP14	14th Conference of the Parties (to the Convention on Biological Diversity)		
CRIOBE	Centre de Recherche Insulaire et Observatoire de l'Environnement (French Centre of Island Research and Environmental Observation)		
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent		
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework		
IMPAC5	5th International Marine Protected Areas Congress		
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature		
KM-GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework		
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area (customary/community-based marine management area, widely used in the Pacific)		
MC	Micronesia Challenge		
MPA	Marine Protected Area		
NES	National Environment Service (Cook Islands government agency)		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization		
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measure		
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum		
Q&A	Questions and Answers		
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal		
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (regional intergovernmental organization)		
UN	United Nations		
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre		
UNOC3	Third United Nations Ocean Conference		
YPL	Young Pacific Leaders (US State Department programme and regional youth network)		

Glossary

TERM	LANGUAGE(S)	DEFINITION
Bul	Palauan	A traditional practice in Palau, Micronesia, where the Council of Chiefs designates reef areas off-limits to fishing during known fish spawning and feeding periods.
Kākerōri	Cook Islands Māori	Rarotonga Flycatcher – A rare endemic bird species in the Cook Islands, central to conservation efforts in the Takitumu Conservation Area OECM.
Māori	Māori	Indigenous Polynesian people of Aotearoa (New Zealand). The report references tikanga Māori (Māori protocols) and Te Ara Whānui (a Māori-led research centre).
Mana	Māori	Mana encompasses both spiritual and social dimensions of power, authority, and respect, and is central to Māori concepts of leadership, stewardship, and identity.
Mātaitai	Māori	Customary fishing reserves in Aotearoa, recognised under New Zealand's fisheries legislation.
Moana	Māori	Ocean, sea
Mo'orea	Tahitian	A volcanic island in French Polynesia, part of the Society Islands. Site of Tiaki Moana's Workshop hosted at CRIOBE.
Ngāti	Māori	Prefix meaning "descendants of," used in tribal names (e.g., Ngāti Kuri, an iwi [tribe] in Aotearoa).
Orero	Tahitian	Spoken chant.
Rāhui	Māori/Tahitian	A traditional practice of temporary prohibition to manage resources. Cited as a Pacific conservation tool and potential OECM.
Rangitāhua	Māori	Māori name for the Kermadec Islands, referenced in Ngāti Kuri's marine stewardship work.
Ra'iātea	Tahitian	Sacred island in French Polynesia, location of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Taputapuātea marae. Hosted Tiaki Moana field trips.
Rohe	Māori	Territory, boundary or region.
Taiāpure	Māori	Legally recognised customary fishing areas in Aotearoa, discussed as potential OECMs.
Tapu/Tabu	Māori/Tahitian/ Fijian	Restriction or prohibition, often associated with sacredness or a special status, and it can be applied to various aspects of life, including marine protection.
Taputapuātea	Tahitian	UNESCO-listed marae (sacred site) on Ra'iātea, central to Polynesian navigation and cultural identity.
Tikanga	Māori	Māori protocols/customary practices. Guided the Workshop to ensure culturally safe dialogue.
То'а	Tahitian	Meaning "warrior" or "champion." Appears in To'a Hine Spearfishing, a Tahitian community group.
Waiata	Māori	Song
Whānui	Māori	Extended family/community. Te Ara Whānui refers to a holistic Māori research approach.
wheke/fe'e	Māori/Tahitian	Octopus
Whenua	Māori	Land

Acknowledgments

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who made *Tiaki Moana* possible — to the participants from across the Pacific and beyond, to the 43 inspiring Young Pacific Leaders, to our speakers, facilitators, community hosts, and knowledge holders. Your presence, ideas, and generosity of spirit brought this amazing project to life. *Tiaki Moana* was shaped by each of you, and we are deeply grateful for your contributions.

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To our early supporters who believed in the vision back in November 2023 — thank you for backing *Tiaki Moana* before it became a reality. Your trust made it possible.

- Nicolas Rocle, Stuart Chape, SPREP
- Tamatoa Bambridge, Bernard Rigo Rāhui Center
- Frank and Hinano Murphy Tetiaroa Society
- Pierre Sasal CRIOBE
- Linwood Pendleton Ocean Knowledge Action Network
- Schannel Van Dijken Conservation International NZ
- Dr. Kayla Kingon-Bebb WWF NZ

TEAM

We warmly thank our incredible team, dedicated volunteers, thematic leads, keynote speakers, funding partners, associate partners, and community partners. Your commitment, collaboration, and care were essential to making *Tiaki Moana* a reality.

- Dan Hikuroa
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- Eric Soulier
- Dylan Gerschwitz
- Michelle Rush

FRENCH POLYNESIA

We offer our deepest thanks to our host communities in French Polynesia — Teva I Uta, Mo'orea, and Ra'iātea — for your generous welcomes, cultural leadership, and heartfelt support. Your mana grounded *Tiaki Moana* in place, spirit, and purpose.

- Teva I Uta Deputy Mayor Clément Vergnhes, Mayor Tearii Te Moana Alpha, Betty Tehei
- Mo'orea-Maiao Mayor Evans Haumani,
 Deputy Mayor Elsa Keck, Hereiti Arapari
- Taputapuātea, St Andrew Church of Ra'iātea - Mayor Thomas Moutame, Corinne Levy, Ihirau Piton, Hine Jordan, Atanua and the entire St Andrew family
- Presidency of French Polynesia Moetai Brotherson, the Presidency and Ministerial team
- Rāhui Center, Patrick Rochette, Tiphanie François, Revaiti Rochette
- Te Fare Natura, Hélène Duran and her team, Jérémie Tamarii and his team
- CRIOBE Centre for Island Research and Environmental Observatory, Hinatea O'Connor and the entire team

Thank you to Tahiti Expert DMC for their valued support in helping organize Tiaki Moana.



Guiding Stars and Lighthouses

Navigating Marine Conservation in the Pacific

Across the Pacific, people have long looked to the stars to find their way across vast stretches of ocean. For generations, Pacific Island navigators used the night sky, not compasses or maps, to travel between islands with skill and confidence. These stars weren't built or installed, they were always there, part of the natural world, quietly guiding voyagers through knowledge passed from one generation to the next.

This way of finding direction speaks deeply to how many Pacific communities approach ocean stewardship today. Just like guiding stars, community-led conservation practices, such as traditional marine closures, sacred fishing grounds, and seasonal harvest rules, have been relied on for generations. They were not necessarily created for the purpose of biodiversity conservation, but they deliver real and lasting results for marine ecosystems. These areas now have the potential to be recognised as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, or OECMs.

In contrast, protected areas are like lighthouses, clear, formal, and built with intention. They're designated through laws or policies, with the specific goal of protecting nature. Both approaches matter. But in the

Pacific, where deep cultural, spiritual, and customary connections to the sea shape how people live and care for the ocean, the guiding star metaphor captures something important: that conservation is not new here. It's part of the fabric of island life; it has always been.

The Tiaki Moana Conference in Tahiti brought stakeholders to explore how marine OECMs could help recognise and support these long-standing practices. Tiaki Moana showed that when we acknowledge traditional knowledge and locally led conservation, we open new pathways for protecting biodiversity, ones that are rooted in culture, community, and place.

By recognising both protected areas and OECMs, we strengthen our collective ability to reach global targets, like the goal of conserving at least 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030. And in doing so, we honour both the structures we've built, and the knowledge that has always guided humankind.

In the Pacific, conservation doesn't only come from new tools, it also comes from remembering how people have always found their way. We need both the lighthouses and the stars.



Executive Summary

The Tiaki Moana Summit and Workshop¹ took place in March 2025 in French Polynesia, bringing together 180 participants from 25 Pacific countries and territories, and 35 countries overall. The gathering convened local community and global marine management practitioners, Indigenous leaders, youth, scientists, government officials and regional partners for a Pacific, regional dialogue on ocean protection. Hosted by The Blue Cradle Foundation² in partnership with the Government of French Polynesia, the Rāhui Centre, the communities of Teva I Uta, Mo'orea, and Ra'iātea, the events addressed the urgent need to deepen the understanding of, and explore the potential for, marine OECMs in the Pacific, particularly through community-based and Indigenous-led governance and practice. This also intentionally aligned with the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Target 3 (30x30)³ and the 2024 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidance which emphasize recognising community-based and Indigenous-led conservation measures^{4,5}.

Objectives and Approach

Tiaki Moana was an ambitious event aiming to advance marine conservation by centring community and Indigenous leadership and knowledge, while strengthening regional understanding of, and collaboration for exploring the potential to progress marine OECMs in the Pacific. It prioritised the

sharing of, and support for, local and regional marine management approaches, and exploring if and how OECMs could complement existing Pacific community-based and Indigenous marine practices.

The Summit, held at the Presidential Palace in Tahiti began proceedings, gathering Pacific and global marine conservation and management leaders, community and Indigenous representatives, youth, scientists, and officials for a regional dialogue on ocean protection. President Moetai Brotherson opened the summit emphasizing the deep cultural connection of Pacific peoples to the ocean and the responsibility to be wise guardians for future generations.

Through using a participatorily-designed format the Workshop ensured that all voices, especially those of youth, local communities, and Indigenous participants, shaped the agenda. This approach emphasized respect for Pacific sovereignty, cultural identity, and traditional stewardship while fostering inclusive, collaborative governance and knowledge exchange, and was organised around five themes:

- Indigenous Knowledge and Leadership
- Defining and Implementing Marine OECMs
- Existing Marine Management Tools
- Innovative and Sustainable Approaches
- Governance and Future Generations



Themes and Their Synthesis

The theme discussions, across seven sessions over the three days of the Tiaki Moana Workshop, are summarised below and followed by the summary of the synthesis sessions. These are snapshots of very rich discussions which are elaborated in Section 5.

1. DEFINING AND IMPLEMENTING OECMS

Workshop participants recognised OECMs as a potential tool for achieving the 30x30 target in the Pacific, emphasizing that success there depends on being communitybased, honouring Indigenous governance, ancestral knowledge, and local context. OECMs were seen as distinct from stateled protected areas due to their potential for being community-driven, voluntary and deeply rooted in local practices. Participants highlighted the need for relevant, regional peer-learning networks, clear definitions, and genuine community engagement to explore and progress OECMs in the Pacific. Trust-building, Indigenous leadership, and integration of cultural tools like storytelling were also identified as essential, with a strong call to reframe OECMs through a Pacific lens in a manner that affirms sovereignty and cultural identity.

2. INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

In this theme participants explored the foundational role of Indigenous and local knowledge in adaptive ocean governance and management. They stressed that communities must have determination over the relevant knowledge, tools, and decision-making, and that if progressed, OECMs should reflect community values. The use of standardised frameworks was seen as ineffective, and that adaptability and cultural relevance are essential. From discussions it emerged that true partnerships require

accessible sharing of results and long-term, reciprocal relationships. Furthermore, the re-indigenising of marine governance and management was seen as critical, and the application of OECMs could potentially support self-determined, community-led management.

3. EXISTING MARINE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

These sessions examined how Pacific communities already use traditional and ancestral-knowledge-based systems such as rāhui, locally managed marine areas (LMMAs), bul⁶, mātaitai, tāiapure, and tapu/ tabu, which often also closely align with OECM principles. Participants noted their experience of how effective community-led and inclusive marine management can be, including the benefits of hybrid approaches that bridge ancestral and western systems. Legal recognition of such customary, ancestral and traditional systems was identified as a gap and which often limits support whether financial, legal, institutional etc. Co-management, equity, and local benefits were highlighted as essential, with a clear call from participants that if progressed OECMs should build on existing, communitydriven tools.

4. INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Participants discussed the importance of blending ancestral wisdom with new tools, and that they must always be anchored in the relevant cultural context. Discussions explored how ancestral and traditional knowledge must be passed on and that it could serve as the foundation for advancing OECMs in the Pacific, i.e. through community-centred approaches that prioritise the wellbeing of people, nature and culture including sustainable livelihoods. Approaches like "Weaving Oceania7" and "Ridge to Reef" were highlighted, along with the need for Pacific-adapted toolkits and holistic indicators.

¹ www.tiakimoana.org

² www.bluecradle.org

³ www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3

⁴ iucn.org/resources/publication/guidance-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures-oecms

 $^{5 \}quad \text{portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/PAG-036-En.pdf} \\$

⁶ Please see Glossary for terms used.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X25000065

5. GOVERNANCE & FUTURE GENERATIONS

Current ocean governance and management challenges and the potential of OECMs in the Pacific were explored. Participants agreed that if effective Pacific OECM governance were to advance it requires centring community-based and Indigenous knowledge, empowering youth, and fostering inclusive, participatory governance, management and decision-making structures. Furthermore, youth inclusion, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and culturally grounded, transparent governance were seen as key to legitimacy and long-term success.

Theme Synthesis Session Summary

The Tiaki Moana discussions highlighted the foundational role of communitybased, Indigenous, and local knowledge systems in building resilient and adaptive ocean governance and management. For Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to be progressed across the Pacific, their implementation must be underpinned by Indigenous leadership and ancestral knowledge to ensure they are well-tailored to the local context. Unlike state-led protected areas, OECMs should be community-driven, voluntary, and rooted in longstanding stewardship practices such as rāhui, bul, mātaitai, tāiapure, tapu/ tabu, and locally managed marine areas (LMMAs). Genuine community engagement and trust are essential, and OECMs should affirm sovereignty and strengthen cultural connections.

Across the Theme discussions participants emphasised that communities must control the use of their knowledge and tools, participate in decision-making, and ensure that the use of OECMs reflects local values rather than any imposed, standardized frameworks. Furthermore, partnerships with researchers should prioritise reciprocal relationships and accessible

sharing of results. Discussions explored how re-indigenising ocean governance and management means shifting power to Indigenous peoples, centring ancestral knowledge, and supporting self-determined management with flexible, culturally relevant approaches.

Existing Pacific marine management tools, which blend customary and Western practices, potentially align well with OECMs but often lack legal recognition, which currently limits access to resources and support. Participants agreed that OECMs should build on existing Pacific marine governance and management foundations, uphold traditional sovereignty, and ensure transparent, equitable, and regenerative processes.

Innovation in conservation was seen as blending ancestral wisdom with new tools, anchored in cultural context and sustainable livelihoods. Approaches like "Weaving Oceania" and "Ridge to Reef" were highlighted for restoring land-sea connections, with adequate resourcing, strong leadership, and Indigenous knowledge as essentials. Pacific-adapted toolkits, peer learning networks, and holistic indicators reflecting cultural values were also recommended.

Finally, inclusive governance, youth empowerment, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and culturally grounded structures are vital for legitimacy and effectiveness. OECMs, if culturally grounded and led by Indigenous communities, could serve as living acknowledgments of Pacific stewardship deeply rooted in cultural, spiritual, and ecological knowledge.



Connecting Nature, People and Culture in Place

Immersive excursions in Tahiti, Mo'orea, and Ra'iātea (described further in Section 6.) enabled participants to witness Pacificled stewardship of the land and sea firsthand including visiting ancient sites sacred to Pacific peoples. This reinforced the importance of place-based learning, community ownership of initiatives, Indigenous leadership, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Participants described these experiences as transformative, highlighting the power of spiritual connections, relationships and the centrality of community commitment.

Priority Actions

The following actions arose from analysis of the Summit and Workshop sessions and discussions as priorities if the exploration and potential adoption of OECMs in the Pacific is to progress (and are described further in Section 8.).

- Centre Local Communities and Indigenous Leadership in OECM Governance
- 2. Build Genuine, Participatory
 Community Engagement and Trust

- Recognise and Legally Support Indigenous-led Marine Management Systems
- 4. Develop and Implement Pacific-Specific OECM Tools and Innovations
- **5.** Ensure Inclusive, Transparent, and Culturally Grounded Governance Structures
- 6. Reframe OECMs Through a Pacific Lens Affirming Sovereignty and Cultural Identity
- Secure Sustainable and Innovative Financing Mechanisms
- 8. Foster Regional and International Collaboration and Policy Engagement

Conclusion

Tiaki Moana reflected another important Pacific marine conservation evolution towards enabling more inclusive, community-informed, Indigenous-led, and relationship-centred approaches to marine stewardship. These gatherings laid a strong foundation for continued collaboration, helping to centre Pacific voices, knowledge, and leadership in regional initiatives and to contribute more meaningfully to global marine conservation efforts. The outcomes from Tiaki Moana aim to shape global frameworks, guide policy development, and contribute to a regenerative future for Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa - The Pacific Ocean.

Introduction

Tiaki Moana Vision

The Tiaki Moana vision is to strengthen marine governance and management in the Pacific by centring Indigenous leadership, knowledge, and community-driven stewardship. Its goals include bringing together Pacific peoples who serve as guardians of their ocean territories, building knowledge and understanding about OECMs, assessing interest in their potential application and implementation, and supporting the development of a community of practice to strengthen marine governance and management in the Pacific, including strengthening Indigenous and communityled initiatives. At the gatherings in French Polynesia, and beyond, Tiaki Moana brought together traditional knowledge, community leadership and scientific insight to strengthen inclusive governance, find pathways for sustainable financing, and promote intergenerational learning - laying the groundwork for strengthen marine governance and management that is regenerative and rooted in cultural integrity for generations to come.

Approach

Tiaki Moana was organised over a full week, with the first Summit Day hosted by the Government of French Polynesia at the Presidential Palace, followed by a 3-day participant-led Workshop hosted jointly at the Centre for Insular Research and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE)⁸ and the Fare Natura⁹. It concluded with a 2-day field trip to Ra'iātea to visit the sacred World Heritage Site, Taputapuātea and local communities. Please see Section 4 which describes the Programme including the Summit, Themes, and Workshop approach.

The Tiaki Moana Name and Octopus Motif

We wanted the name to reflect both the purpose of the event and where it was located. In Te Reo Māori, Tiaki means to look after, care, protect, conserve, save and as a noun looking after, protection, safeguarding, and Moana means ocean. By using a language indigenous to Oceania, we hoped that all present could see themselves in the name, or could at least relate to it, even though there were a range of languages present. It was important to the organisers that the name reflect hope, agency and action. The name also centres the ocean, not people, consistent with how many in Oceania see their relationship with the ocean.

In 2022 the Blue Climate Summit was held in Tahiti, Mo'orea and Ra'iātea, French Polynesia. During the event, Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu, Minister for Environment and Culture shared a powerful message, based around the image of the wheke/fe'e/octopus, with Tahiti and Mo'orea at the centre, and the 8 arms extending out in various directions. The image depicts the ancient navigation pathways, and the Minister declared the ancient pathways 'open'. Furthermore, Hinano Murphy sang a beautiful song during IMPAC5, and at Tiaki Moana, about the importance of the wheke/ fe'e/octopus to the Pacific Ocean. These inspirational messages became anchors for Tiaki Moana and for the development of the wheke/fe'e/octopus motif by a local artist tasked with logo creation, the design of which also included 'Oceania' patterns.

⁸ https://www.criobe.pf/en/home/

⁹ https://www.farenatura.org/



TIAKI MOANA

The logo was designed by Hoanui, Polynesian Artist based in Tahiti

The Tiaki Moana logo brings together key elements that symbolize unity between people, land, and ocean. At its center, the octopus represents intelligence, adaptability, and the hidden potential of the ocean. A tiki and two human figures reflect shared responsibility and care, positioned between mountains and ocean waves to illustrate the connection from land to sea. Marine life like turtles and whales signifies biodiversity and the interdependence of all living things. Cultural patterns and Pacific island shapes ground the design in place, with the ocean acting as both a boundary and a thread linking it all. The logo expresses a vision of collective guardianship, rooted in Pacific identity and ecological harmony.

Background

Tiaki Moana arose out of several interrelated aspects:

- The intentional foundation for Tiaki Moana is Blue Cradle Foundation's deep respect for Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa as a living ocean and great connector and for those who care for it. This inspired Blue Cradle Foundation to create a space for connection, collaboration, and shared purpose.
- The Blue Cradle Foundation organisational journey having partnered with Te Āti Awa to bid to host the 6th International Marine Protected Areas Congress in Wellington, New Zealand and thus having attended IMPAC5¹⁰, with Te Āti Awa Chairman Mr Kura Moeahu, and then developing relationships with other delegates from Aotearoa New Zealand there.

- Participants asked if OECMs could be better understood and thus advanced in the Pacific, given the many potential marine OECMs, including rāhui, tapu/ tabu, mātaitai, taiāpure, LMMAs and customary fishing areas.
- Several Tiaki Moana partner organisations attended and identified their common interest in better application of OECMs in the Pacific.
- Recognition by the Tiaki Moana
 organisational partners that there was
 variable knowledge and understanding
 about marine OECMs and their
 implementation in the Pacific and that
 there are many conversations with
 technical experts and practitioners at
 various marine management meetings
 that often produce more questions
 than answers. Furthermore, Blue Cradle
 Foundation sought to ensure that those
 who may not usually have a voice at such



Community and Indigenousled 30 by 30 dialogue at IMPAC5 in Vancouver in February 2023

• At IMPAC5:

- Sessions underscored the vital role of Indigenous and local community knowledge and leadership in marine conservation.
- Sessions explored the status of marine OECMs. This recognised that where a more nuanced and locally adapted approach is required to deliver effective conservation outcomes and the Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework "30x30" target, OECMs may be important.
- meetings should be brought into these conversations.
- Blue Cradle Foundation's commitment to empowering youth leadership demonstrated through securing support from the United States Department of State Young Pacific Leaders programme.
- The subsequent establishment of Tiaki Moana as a dedicated forum for improving awareness about and understanding of how Indigenous knowledge systems can improve marine and cultural health and to better understand OECMs in the Pacific context.

Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous peoples worldwide have developed and maintained profound and multifaceted relationships with the ocean for thousands of years. These relationships encompass sophisticated knowledge systems, comprising complex, relational, interconnected, intergenerational, placebased, cumulative, holistic knowledge, cultural practices, regenerative underpinnings, governance frameworks, and spiritual connections that continue to influence contemporary marine management approaches.

For many coastal Indigenous communities, the ocean is not merely a resource but a living entity with spiritual dimensions. Creation stories often feature the ocean as a central element, or as a personified being, and reinforce the inseparability of people, nature and culture. Ceremonies and rituals honour marine beings and maintain reciprocal relationships. The ocean serves as a connection to ancestors who travelled on, undertook rituals in and fished the same waters, amongst other ways of maintaining

relationships. Many groups view themselves as stewards or guardians, rather than owners of marine environments, who enjoy user privileges, which when invoked hold consequent responsibilities.

Furthermore, Indigenous maritime knowledge represents comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the ocean and atmosphere, and marine ecosystems developed through generations of observation and practical experience, encompassing detailed understanding of the ocean and marine ecosystems, marine species, their behaviours, and ecological relationships, recognition of seasonal changes and weather patterns and knowledge of underwater topography. The knowledge includes precise navigation techniques utilising celestial bodies, ocean currents, wind patterns and wildlife behaviours. Many Indigenous communities maintain detailed taxonomic classifications of marine species that identify ecological relationships and behavioural patterns. Such knowledge systems inform regenerative harvesting methods that maintain ecosystem balance.



The Global Biodiversity Framework

In 2010, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, setting ambitious goals for global conservation efforts¹¹. Among these targets were the objectives to protect 10% of the world's oceans and 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas by 2020. Although no formal definition was provided at that time this marked the first explicit reference to OECMs highlighting the need for innovative and flexible conservation strategies beyond traditional protected areas.

In 2015, Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) or "Life Below Water", focused on conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, was adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹² and which includes the 10% Aichi target.

By 2018, OECMs significantly advanced when they were formally defined by the 14th Conference of the Parties (COP14).

In 2022, the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF)¹³ marked another milestone in international conservation by setting an ambitious 30x30 target (Target 3), which aims to conserve at least 30% of the world's terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas by 2030. The framework explicitly recognises the role of OECMs in achieving this target, and which are now being reported in the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre's World OECM Database¹⁴.

Also, some countries are now finalizing their national and regional approaches to OECMs, integrating them into broader conservation strategies and reporting towards delivering the KM-GBF. Within the various working groups associated with delivering the 30x30 target, conversations have also begun on what Indigenous-led OECMs might look like and Tiaki Moana played an important role to be able to further develop these.

- 11 https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets
- 12 https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
- 13 https://www.cbd.int/gbf
- 14 https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms?tab=OECMs



What are OECMs?

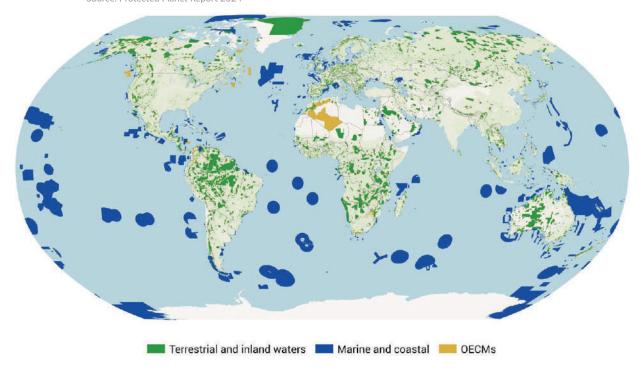
OECMs are recognised and defined¹⁵ under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and are essential for achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity framework 30x30 target (Target 3)¹⁶, which aims to conserve at least 30% of global terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas by 2030¹⁷. They provide flexibility in conservation strategies, allowing for the inclusion of areas that may not meet the criteria of protected areas but still offer significant conservation benefits¹⁸.

Parties to CBD have defined an OECM as "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem

functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values"¹⁹. OECMs can include a variety of governance types, such as fisheries closures, privately held areas, shipwrecks protected for historical significance, locally managed marine areas, sacred natural sites, and territories and waters under Indigenous or community management with Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)²⁰.

OECMs can provide a significant opportunity to catalyse more inclusive and diverse approaches to achieving the 30x30 target by facilitating and accurately accounting for local, Indigenous, and other protections that fall outside the current scope of conventional protected areas; and incentivizing meaningful conservation actions by sectors not typically associated with the protection of biodiversity.

Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) of the world, August 2024. Terrestrial protected areas are shown in green, marine protected areas in blue and OECMs in orange. Source: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2024. Source: Protected Planet Report 2024



¹⁵ https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf

¹⁶ Text of Target 3: Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing Indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories. https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3

¹⁷ https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3

¹⁸ https://www.iccaconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/oecms_5.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf

²⁰ https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/51773

Participants and Representation

Tiaki Moana included a vibrant, diverse community of 180 participants from 25 Pacific countries and territories and 35 countries in all. The gathering convened local community and global marine management practitioners, Indigenous leaders, youth, scientists, and government officials and regional partners for a regional dialogue on ocean protection. Pacific representation was strong including from American Samoa, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hawaii, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Rapa Nui, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Tiaki Moana prioritised the participation of Indigenous and local communities from across Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Australasia. Sessions were conducted in multiple Pacific languages, including French, Reo Tahiti, English, Te Reo Māori, some Chamorro was spoken, and French/English translation support was provided.

Supported by the US Department of State, 42 Young Pacific Leaders from 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories were selected to attend Tiaki Moana to ensure a strong youth presence. Additionally, women played a significant role throughout the events, as keynote speakers, panellists, facilitators, co-leads and volunteers. Most participants attended the first two main events: the Summit and Workshop, while about half joined the optional Ra'iātea field trip.



Programme Overview

The Summit

Tiaki Moana opened with a high-level Summit held at the Presidential Palace of French Polynesia, in Papeete, Tahiti. This brought together global and regional intergovernmental representatives, Indigenous leaders, youth, scientists, local communities, marine practitioners, and government officials for a regional dialogue on ocean protection.

Opening Addresses

The Summit opened with addresses that underscored the urgent state of the ocean and the necessity for inclusive, locally grounded conservation. Mr Tamatoa Bambridge, Research Director at the National Centre for Scientific Research and Director of the Rāhui Centre, highlighted the ocean's critical role in food webs, carbon sequestration, and the impacts of plastics on coral resilience, emphasizing the need for \$150 billion annually to close the SDG14 gap and the vital inclusion of Indigenous and local communities in marine protection. Ms Sam Rowland, Chair of the Blue Cradle Foundation, highlighted the direct impacts of environmental decline on Pacific communities and economies. Mr James Nikitine, Executive Director, acknowledged the generosity of host communities -Teva I Uta, Mo'orea, and Ra'iātea - and emphasised that 'marine conservation must evolve not from the top down, but from the bottom up grounded in justice, equity and imagination',

particularly in the context of mounting environmental and geopolitical challenges. Dr. Dan Hikuroa, of Waipapa Taumata Rau, Auckland University explained the significance of the Summit's name, "Tiaki Moana," being rooted in Te Reo Māori, and recounted the inspirational message from Mr Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu, French Polynesia's Minister for Environment and Culture, who invoked the octopus motif to symbolize Pacific interconnectedness and ancient navigation pathways.

In his opening comments Mr Johnny Briggs, Co-Chair of the IUCN OECM Marine Specialist Group and Director at Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy, traced the evolution of area-based conservation targets from the 2010 Aichi Targets through to the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, noting the lag in recognizing OECMs and the need for more inclusive governance structures. Ms Easter Chu Shing, Deputy Director of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), then affirmed the value of Pacific-specific approaches like LMMAs and encouraged regionally tailored engagement. Ms Alexia Branch of the US Department of State highlighted the Young Pacific Leaders program's role in empowering emerging leaders and fostering regional prosperity. Mr Xavier Marotel, representing the High Commission of the Republic in French Polynesia, welcomed participants and outlined French Polynesia's vision for ocean stewardship, emphasizing traditional



governance models, regional solidarity, and the integration of youth and local knowledge in shaping a sustainable future for the Pacific and its ocean.

In his opening address President Moetai Brotherson of French Polynesia emphasized the deep connection between Pacific peoples and the ocean, highlighting both cultural heritage and the urgent responsibility to be wise guardians for, and good ancestors of, future generations. He acknowledged the significant efforts in French Polynesia to protect the ocean, such as the declaration of Tai Nui Atea, a vast marine-managed area in 2018 and the effectiveness of communityled rāhui initiatives. He underscored the importance of ensuring that Pacific voices are heard internationally, especially at the third United Nations Ocean Conference. He inspired participants by reminding them that collective action can transform individuals from often feeling like they are mere "droplets", into realising that they are the ocean, and having great impact.

Ms Aulani Wilhelm, Chief Executive Officer of Nia Tero



Keynote Addresses

Ms Aulani Wilhelm, Chief Executive Officer of Nia Tero spoke on "Indigeneity in a Changing Climate," stressing the privilege and duty of ocean guardianship, the importance of Indigenous knowledge, and the need to frame the ocean as a space of regeneration. She called for Pacific leadership in achieving the 30x30 target and highlighted the necessity of unity and resilience in the face of global crises.

IUCN Oceania Regional Director Ms Leituala Kuniselani Toelupe Tago addressed the topic of "Embracing Indigenous Stewardship and Advancing OECMs for a Resilient Pacific." She emphasized the Pacific's tradition of customary conservation, the opportunity to formally recognise Indigenous-led approaches through OECMs, and the risks from over-regulation and the exclusion of Indigenous voices. Ms Tago emphasized the importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and urged the region to lead in defining conservation practices that empower Indigenous communities.

Ms Sheridan Waitai of Ngāti Kuri's Te Ara Whānui Research Centre, in Aotearoa New Zealand, then spoke about "Relationships for Ocean Prosperity" emphasizing that the iwi are working to see the Wai262²¹ Treaty of Waitangi claim through to conclusion. Wai 262 seeks Māori authority over native flora, fauna, and associated intellectual property in Aotearoa New Zealand. She also outlined the role of Te Ara Whānui the first iwi-led centre advancing research on Rangitāhua (Kermadec Islands) and the Ngāti Kuri rohe, aiming for holistic wellbeing and environmental balance. Ms Waitai underscored that conservation (in Aotearoa New Zealand) must follow tikanga Māori, enable traditional practices, and foster strong partnerships with scientists, industry, and communities.

Young Pacific Leaders panel



Panels

The first panel session, convened by Mr Angelo Villagomez from the Centre for American Progress, featured insights from Ms Marguerite Taiarui (Rāhui Centre Tahiti), Mr Alifereti Tawake (LMMA Network Fiji), and Ms Bryant J. Zebedy (Marshall Islands Marine Resource Authority) who collectively highlighted the resurgence and evolving role of traditional and community-led marine conservation practices across the Pacific. Ms Taiarui emphasized the hybrid approach in French Polynesia's rāhui system, which combines local knowledge, scientific monitoring, and adaptive management through a five-stage process, while acknowledging the challenges in sustaining ongoing community dialogue. Mr Tawake shared the deep cultural connections underpinning Fiji's 400 LMMAs, which prioritize food security, cultural stewardship, and community aspirations, and have strong community engagement, and added that there are now 3000 LMMAs across the Pacific. Mr Zebedy detailed the Marshall Islands' Protected Areas Network, which protects 33% of nearshore marine areas through diverse categories of marine protected areas, emphasizing adaptive management, sustainable livelihoods, and community involvement.

During the Question-and-Answer session (Q&A), panellists discussed the difficulties associated with balancing traditional fishing rights and commercial pressures, the complexity of translating scientific models into community practice, and the importance

of FPIC. Challenges such as enforcement, regulatory frameworks, and sustaining longterm community engagement were also mentioned, with panellists stressing the need for patience, perseverance, dialogue, and culturally appropriate governance. The panel underscored that conservation ultimately centres on people and relationships, calling for more Pacific Islanders in scientific and leadership roles to bridge traditional practices with contemporary conservation science and policy. The session highlighted the value of integrating diverse knowledge systems, fostering community ownership, and maintaining adaptive, inclusive management to ensure effective and culturally resonant marine conservation across the Pacific.

Mr. Rahul Chand, IUCN Oceania Protected and Conserved Areas Programme Coordinator, introduced the second panel by reviewing the status of marine OECMs in the Pacific and emphasized the critical need for alignment with customary governance and Indigenous consent. He cautioned against the superficial use of OECM status merely to meet conservation targets without achieving genuine biodiversity gains. Highlighting successful examples in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and the Cook Islands' Takitumu Conservation Area which is the first Pacific terrestrial OECM and notably boosted the endemic Kākerōri bird population, Mr. Chand advocated for flexible, community-driven OECMs with primary conservation objectives that support both long-term biodiversity and cultural resilience.

Panel discussions featured Ms Jessie Nicholson, a Young Pacific Leader and Biodiversity Coordinator from the Cook Islands National Environment Service, Olivier Chassot, Senior Programme Officer. Protected, Conserved and Heritage Areas, IUCN-Asia Regional Office, and Juney Ward, SPREP Coastal Marine Adviser. The rich discussion centred on the philosophical and practical challenges of implementing OECMs in the Pacific. A key theme was the importance of recognising and supporting existing community-driven conservation efforts rather than rushing to designate new areas superficially, often described as "paper parks." Mr Chassot beautifully suggested focusing on the "shining stars" i.e. the places already cared for by local people and private landowners, and ensuring their long-term governance and stewardship. Mr Chand highlighted that while communities might seek recognition and funding through OECMs, the decision to register an area must remain with them, respecting autonomy and consent. The Cook Islands' experience with the Takitumu Conservation Area was frequently cited as a success story, demonstrating the value of partnerships, FPIC, and culturally grounded governance. Challenges around funding, enforcement, and balancing traditional and scientific approaches were also raised, with panellists stressing that conservation is fundamentally about people, relationships, and leadership rooted in Pacific values.

Another major theme was the need for adaptable, inclusive, and culturally relevant frameworks that interweave Indigenous knowledge and community priorities. Participants discussed the complexities of FPIC processes, the importance of transparent communication, and the difficulties in monitoring and enforcing conservation outcomes that use rigid, one-size-fits-all rules. Several speakers noted that OECMs do not necessarily require new laws but can be recognized within existing national policies, with community-led monitoring playing a vital role in assessing effectiveness. The risk of development pressures and the need for robust threat identification and mitigation were highlighted, alongside the importance of engaging youth and ensuring intergenerational knowledge transfer. Overall, the dialogue underscored that successful OECMs must be living, community-embedded initiatives that support biodiversity and cultural resilience while fostering trust, partnerships, and sustainable livelihoods.

To close the Tiaki Moana Summit, a panel of Young Pacific Leaders envisioned a future Pacific in 2035. Ms Sabrina Suluai-Mahuka from American Samoa, Ms Sheila Bauta from the Mariana Islands, Mr Gabriel Mara from Fiji, and Mr Mananui Ramsden from Aotearoa New Zealand imagined a gathering in West Papua focused on ocean

The First panel, facilitated by Angelo Villagomez, Center for American Progress





stewardship. In an entertaining and engaging manner that demonstrated the vibrant Tiaki Moana spirit, they imagined overcoming colonial legacies and geopolitical divisions and described how a return to Indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and communityled conservation had been achieved. Mr Ramsden highlighted the importance of self-determination and cultural continuity, urging current generations to be "great ancestors" who prepare future generations to care for the ocean. Ms Bauta spoke of peacebuilding and transforming militarization into security rooted in Pacific values, while Ms Suluai-Mahuka stressed resilience as an active, intergenerational process of healing and empowerment. Mr Mara noted how in 2035 leaders celebrated achieving ambitious conservation goals including 30x30 which had integrated terrestrial and marine protections including LMMAs, OECMs, and tapu/tabu areas.

Their shared vision underscored that the ocean is more than a resource, and that it is the source of identity, heritage, and future prosperity in the Pacific, if not the world. They called for collective leadership, especially by youth and women, to nurture sustainable relationships with the moana, emphasizing peace, self-determination, and cultural revival as central to Pacific Ocean governance. Their messages conveyed hope, responsibility, and the importance of being committed to building resilience and stewardship in the generations yet to come.

The Workshop

The Tiaki Moana Workshop was a participant-driven, flexible event designed to foster open discussion, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning rather than formal presentations. Drawing on the principles of an Unconference, described below, and using a "marketplace" format, participants proposed topics for discussion within five thematic sessions, and then presented them by sharing stories, challenges, and successes related to marine protection. This approach created a motivating and creative atmosphere, encouraging participants to engage deeply with the issues and move freely between sessions.

Each 1.15-hour session began with participants introducing their topics, which were then discussed and explored to generate key insights on OECMs and marine protection in the Pacific. These insights were written on sticky notes and placed on a 'wheke' motif, visually organizing the discussion outcomes. Dedicated facilitators ensured meaningful contributions from all attendees and helped document discussions, while co-leads guided conversations to conclusions and provided expert input when needed. This participatory format supported the sharing of diverse perspectives and knowledge, enabled the distillation of key points, and generated practical recommendations. The Theme findings and Synthesis are presented in Section 5. Beyond the facilitated and informal discussions, the Workshop also initiated the building of a Pacific community of practice aimed at strengthening Indigenous and community-led marine conservation outcomes.

Key Features of an Unconference

Unconferences have four key features²²:

- Participant-Driven Agenda: Cognisant of the over-arching themes, attendees propose and vote on session topics at the start of the event, in a "marketplace" where anyone can suggest and lead a session.
- Flexible Format: The event is usually structured with open time slots for discussions, workshops, or activities, rather than a rigid schedule.
- Collaborative Atmosphere: Emphasis is placed on collaboration, interaction, and sharing of knowledge among participants rather than top-down presentations from experts.
- Informal Setting: The environment is often more casual and less formal than traditional conferences, fostering open communication and creativity.
 Participants may move between sessions.

Six Tikanga (Principles) were developed to guide the Workshop

As the Blue Cradle Foundation is based in New Zealand, it designed Tiaki Moana using bicultural approaches found there. Thus, drawing on the Te Ao Māori²³ foundations of the facilitation team, six tikanga were developed to guide the Workshop and ensure that participants could meaningfully contribute in a culturally safe manner.

- Consent: Ensuring permission for recording and sharing knowledge.
- Equitable Voice: Guaranteeing all participants, regardless of background, could contribute.
- **3. Upholding Respect:** For presenters, participants, and the knowledge shared.
- 4. Active Listening: Engaging fully in dialogue and asking questions.
- Time Consciousness: Managing sessions to allow for both content and discussion.
- **6. Have Fun:** Fostering enjoyment and connection throughout the event.
- 22 https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/hho/open-space-technology/
- 23 The Māori worldview



Thematic Session Outcomes and Synthesis

The Themes

With 7 sessions per theme over 3 days much rich material was generated, and which was collated by note-takers, the co-leads, and facilitators in notes pasted onto the theme's 'wheke'. There was a significant range of knowledge and understanding amongst participants about OECMs to begin with and although OECMS were briefly introduced at the start of the Workshop, it was not possible to establish a common, foundational understanding about them within each theme.

Consequently a common finding across all themes was the cautious embrace of exploring the potential of OECMs to advance marine conservation and management in the Pacific rather than universal acceptance. Indeed, broad agreement arose to propose that Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures could be renamed 'Our' Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, to reflect the essential, local and community-based nature of such places in the Pacific.

Theme Outcomes

1. DEFINING & IMPLEMENTING OECMS

In this theme participants acknowledged the potential of OECMs to contribute towards achieving the global 30x30 target but noted that their success in the Pacific depends on being community-based, honouring Indigenous governance, ancestral and customary knowledge, and local context. An important positive for OECMs is how they differ from state-led protected areas i.e. by being community-driven, voluntary,

and often rooted in long-standing practices. However, there was not universal agreement on if or how to advance OECMs in the Pacific. Key recommendations arising from discussions include establishing a regional peer-learning network, clarifying what OECMs are, and ensuring genuine community engagement. It was also noted that trust-building is essential, requiring clear communication, transparency, and respect for consent and autonomy. Furthermore, leadership should be collective, Indigenousled, and anchored in local practices. Integration of cultural tools such as oral storytelling and ceremonies, is also vital, as is documenting Indigenous-led case studies. It was agreed that if they are to be successfully developed in the Pacific OECMs must be reframed through a Pacific lens, affirm sovereignty and deepen the relationships between people, nature and culture.

2. INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

That Indigenous and local knowledge systems are foundational for adaptive and resilient ocean governance and management was a central tenet of this theme. Participants discussed that enabling local marine governance and management means that communities must control their knowledge, tools, and genuinely be able to lead or influence decision-making processes. It was noted how standardised, one-sizefits-all frameworks are often ineffective in the Pacific, and that adaptability and cultural relevance are key. Furthermore, it was discussed how true partnerships with local communities require researchers to share results in accessible ways and to prioritise long-term, reciprocal relationships. This

theme explored how the re-indigenising of ocean governance and marine management involves shifting power, centring traditional ecological knowledge, and supporting self-determined governance. Finally, participants also agreed that, if they are to progress in the Pacific, OECMs should be shaped by community values, with mechanisms for flexible implementation and financial support designed by, and for, communities.

3. EXISTING MARINE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

This theme explored the how Pacific communities already use traditional systems like rāhui, LMMAs, bul, mātaitai, tāiapure, and tapu/tabu, and village by-laws where appropriate, and that these can often align with the principles of OECMs. It was noted that in the Pacific effective marine management is community-led, inclusive. and rooted in Indigenous practices, and that hybrid approaches that bridge ancestral and western systems are most successful when tailored to local contexts. However, discussion also noted that legal recognition of customary systems is lacking and that this often limits funding and support. Arising from this theme was how essential enabling co-management, equity, and local benefits are, as well as transparency in monitoring and evaluation. It concluded that, if OECMs are to progress in the Pacific, that they should build upon existing, community-driven tools, ensuring that local, customary and/or

Indigenous sovereignty is not undermined, and that processes remain flexible, fair, just and equitable.

4. INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Through rich discussions participants in this theme noted that innovation in Pacific conservation means blending ancestral wisdom with new tools, and which must always be grounded in the cultural context. Furthermore, with respect to OECMs, traditional knowledge must be passed on and serve as the basis and community-centred approaches must prioritise local decisionmaking and sustainable livelihoods, such as traditional aquaculture and food systems. Specifically mentioned were the approaches of "Weaving Oceania" which highlights cross-border cultural connections, while "Ridge to Reef" approaches restore land to sea linkages, and that both are needed. The group noted that nature-based solutions like mangrove planting and fish trap restoration are currently in-vogue but that this work must be properly resourced and communityled to progress effectively. The discussions surfaced how the important foundations for progress in innovation and sustainability are trust, equity, and knowledge sharing and the group called for Pacific-adapted toolkits, peer learning, and holistic indicators that reflect cultural values and demonstrate community empowerment.





5. GOVERNANCE & FUTURE GENERATIONS

Arising from these sessions was that effective governance for OECMs in the Pacific requires centring Indigenous knowledge, empowering youth, and fostering inclusive, participatory structures. Furthermore, youth must be recognised as present and not just future leaders, and who should have formal roles in decision-making today. This theme explored how governance should be "inside-out", i.e. that it be rooted in individual and collective values, rather than any form of governance being imposed

from outside. It was noted how critical integrating customary and modern systems, ensuring transparency, and supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer are. It also emerged that inclusive management structures should guarantee real community agency, with tailored capacity-building, technological support, and sustainable financing. Lastly, this theme was clear about how the legitimacy and effectiveness of OECMs depend on respecting local autonomy, building trust, and creating unified, culturally grounded governance.

Synthesis

Across the Pacific, progressing OECMs requires the processes to do so being rooted in the following which arose from all five Workshop Themes:

- centring Indigenous leadership and knowledge,
- 2. prioritizing community empowerment,
- **3**. ensuring adaptability and cultural relevance, and;
- **4**. fostering inclusive governance for future generations.

OECMs are not new to the region and the Tiaki Moana Workshop explored how they can align with long-standing practices of stewardship, such as rāhui and locally managed marine areas, which are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and community values.

The Pacific OECM experience to date underscores that they must be community-driven, voluntary, and adapted to local contexts, rather than imposed through any form of standardised external framework.

Furthermore, all forms of genuine partnerships, progressing marine management require trust, clear communication, and a recognition that local, Indigenous knowledge and modern science must work together.

In the Pacific Indigenous and local knowledge systems are foundational to resilient ocean governance and adaptive management. Empowering communities means supporting their control over knowledge, tools, and decision-making processes, and ensuring that any conservation initiative is guided by local aspirations and values.

One-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective in the Pacific's diverse cultural and ecological land and seascapes; instead, if they are to progress in the Pacific OECMs should remain flexible, allowing for contextual interpretation and implementation. Furthermore, this flexibility needs to be supported by peer learning networks, documentation of Indigenous-led case studies, and the integration of oral storytelling, ceremonies, and other cultural tools. Reindigenising marine governance involves shifting power to Indigenous communities, centring Indigenous knowledge, and supporting selfdetermined governance, with mechanisms for financial and technical support designed by and for communities.

Existing marine management in the Pacific already demonstrates the power of community-led, inclusive, and hybrid approaches that blend customary and contemporary systems. Legal recognition and support for these such customary and ancestrally based systems remains limited, highlighting the need for frameworks that legitimize and amplify what is already working at the community level. OECMs should build upon these foundations, ensuring that traditional sovereignty is not undermined and that processes remain transparent, equitable, just and become regenerative.

Innovation in Pacific conservation means weaving together ancestral wisdom with new tools, and in a manner that is always grounded in cultural context and sustainable livelihoods.

"Ridge to Reef" approaches, tailored and appropriate nature-based solutions, and regional knowledge-sharing platforms are all vital for restoring connections between land and sea, supporting sustainable food systems, and building resilience to change.

Central to all these efforts is the need for inclusive, participatory governance that empowers youth and future generations as present and future leaders.

Governance models must reflect community realities and be rooted in shared values, not external mandates.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer, capacity-building, and the creation of formal roles for youth in decision-making are essential if OECMs are to progress and be sustained over time. Ultimately, the legitimacy, progress and effectiveness of OECMs in the Pacific depends upon respecting local autonomy, building trust, and creating culturally grounded governance structures that reflect the region's diversity and strengths.

In summary, the common themes advocate for a paradigm shift: from top-down, externally driven conservation to inclusive. **Indigenous** and local community-led. and relationshipcentred. ocean stewardship that is adaptable, equitable, and grounded in **Pacific ways of** knowing.

Connecting Nature, People & Culture in Place

Recognising the importance of connecting nature and culture while offering a meaningful experience, especially for those participants visiting French Polynesia for the first time, Tiaki Moana organisers worked closely with local communities beforehand. These relationships enabled the delivery of authentic welcome ceremonies and immersive excursions.

The first welcome took place ahead of the Summit, with the Teva I Uta community on Tahiti, hosting the Young Pacific Leaders, Tiaki Moana organisers and other participants in a ceremony rooted in local customs, shared language, and food. This offered a first-hand experience of the rich cultural diversity that exists across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

The following day, the Summit began with a vibrant and heartfelt performance by students from Farehei Nui School in Puurai, Fa'a'ā, setting a powerful tone for the gathering exemplified by a young student delivering a poignant Orero that deeply moved the audience:

"Have you heard the sorrow of the ocean? It comes from the deep and from the shore... I regret then... What will my future be? Come, help me, protect the ocean! I am... Guardian of the oceans!"

In response, the Tiaki Moana organisers and Young Pacific Leaders joined the stage, offering Purea Nei, a Māori waiata of cleansing and intention. This symbolic exchange grounded the Summit in profound cultural respect and ceremony, established the shared purpose and anchored the days to follow in cultural connection and emotional resonance.

Arriving in Mo'orea for the workshop, participants were welcomed by the To'a Uhina Marquesian dance group, the Directors of the CRIOBE and Fare Natura,





and the Deputy-Mayor of Mo'orea-Maiao. The final welcome at the St André Church in Uturoa, on Ra'iātea was hosted by YPL Ihirau Piton and his family. This was followed by a powerful cultural ceremony at the sacred marae complex of Taputapuātea, a UNESCO World Heritage Area and place of long-standing significance to Pacific history, culture and voyaging.

During the workshop, two field trip excursions, whenua and moana were offered to foster connection between participants and place. The whenua experience, led by the Tahitian Historical Society, included tapamaking, weaving, bush walks, and singing. The moana experience, coordinated by Reva Atea, featured presentations by To'a Hine Spearfishing and Oceania on sustainable fishing, acoustic marine monitoring and coral reef conservation.

Participants consistently described all these experiences as deeply impactful, emphasising the value of spiritual connection, youth involvement and place-based learning to develop relationships and collective commitment. Many participants reflected that the hands-on activities offered a meaningful shift from abstract dialogue to embodied understanding of land and sea stewardship in context. The field experiences also reinforced the events' intentional emphasis on Indigenous leadership, intergenerational learning, and the need for conservation models that are both culturally grounded and adaptive to local realities and all underscoring: that effective marine conservation is rooted in relationships between people, place, culture and the ocean itself.

Thank you to Air Tahiti for their support of the Young Pacific Leaders



Te Reo o Te Moana: The Voice of the Ocean

Following the conclusion of Tiaki Moana, many participants traveled back to Tahiti for an event²⁴ organized by Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy and Te Ora Naho - FAPE, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resources and the Environment, the Assembly of French Polynesia, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Blue Cradle Foundation. Recognized as an official event of the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), this gathering amplified the

voices of the Pacific and called for urgent and ambitious action to protect the Pacific Ocean. This day highlighted successful experiences across the Pacific establishing large-scale Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The President of French Polynesia, Moetai Brotherson, also joined over 300 individual signatories across the Pacific to endorse the Call to Action directed toward UNOC3 ("Te Reo o Te Moana / The Voice of the Ocean")."

24 https://www.teoranaho-fape.org/post/te-reo-o-te-moana-la-voix-de-l-oc%C3%A9an



Priority Actions

The following actions arose from analysis of the Summit and Workshop sessions and discussions as priorities if the further exploration and potential adoption of OECMs in the Pacific is to progress.

1. Centre Local Communities and Indigenous Leadership in OECM Governance

Ensure that local communities and Indigenous peoples have full authority over knowledge, tools, and decision-making processes, with OECMs reflecting their values, sovereignty, and cultural context.

2. Build Genuine, Participatory Community Engagement and Trust

Facilitate inclusive, long-term partnerships through transparent communication, accessible sharing of research results, and the interweaving of cultural practices such as storytelling to strengthen legitimacy and connection.

3. Recognize and Legally Support Indigenous-led Marine Management Systems

Secure formal legal recognition and institutional support for indigenous-led, customary management tools like rāhui, LMMAs, bul, mātaitai, tāiapure, and tapu/tabu to enable sustainable financing and policy backing.

4. Develop and Implement Pacific-Specific OECM Tools and Innovations

Co-design culturally anchored guidelines, toolkits, and holistic indicators that blend Indigenous ancestral wisdom with innovative approaches to support sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem health.

5. Ensure Inclusive, Transparent, and Culturally Grounded Governance Structures

Establish governance frameworks that empower Indigenous knowledge holders and youth, foster intergenerational knowledge transfer, and maintain transparency for legitimacy, equity, and justice.

6. Reframe OECMs Through a Pacific Lens Affirming Sovereignty and Cultural Identity

Reframe OECMs as expressions of Indigenous stewardship that affirm local autonomy, deepen cultural connections, and enhance their uptake through empowering community leadership.

7. Deliver Sustainable and Innovative Financing Mechanisms

Develop and deliver diverse and resilient financing strategies including trust funds, blended finance, blue bonds²⁵, and partnerships with philanthropy and the private sector that effectively support greater community-based and Indigenous-led marine management.

8. Establish a Regional Peer-Learning Network and Foster Collaboration

Create and maintain a Pacific-wide peer-learning network to facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaboration among Indigenous leaders, communities, young pacific leaders, NGOs, governments and regional bodies, strengthening advocacy and integration of OECMs into broader marine and biodiversity strategies.

Collectively progressed, these actions would support a culturally rooted, community-led, and regionally coordinated approach to advancing Indigenous-led marine governance, conservation and management in the Pacific, including progressing OECMs where appropriate and that all aligns with progressing the global biodiversity targets while respecting Pacific values and governance systems.

25 https://oursharedseas.com/blue-bonds/





Traditional welcome and concert at St Andrew Church in Ra'iātea



Traditional welcome and ceremony at Teva I Uta, Tahiti

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Katherine Short (Principal & Director of F.L.O.W. Collaborative Ltd) is an experienced marine conservation and management policy and science analyst, researcher and advocate, and programme developer. Building upon three decades of experience, including 17 years in WWF promoting ecosystem-based management and the Marine Stewardship Council globally, in 2013 she co-founded Terra Moana Ltd with Tony Craig. They blended their diverse perspectives to advance sustainable seafood, advise Moana New Zealand²⁵, the largest-Māoriowned seafood company on their sustainability journey, and deliver Sustainable Seas Science Challenge blue economy²⁷ and risk and uncertainty²⁸ projects. With an ecologists' systems thinking brain

and Conservation Science Masters²⁹ in marine natural capital and sustainable seafood, Katherine's work thoroughly integrates the values of ecological health, community collaboration, and responsible corporate governance, all based upon thorough science, policy and real-world experience, research and evidence.

Katherine served as a Blue Cradle Foundation Board Trustee 2022-2024. Having raised significant marine conservation funds and challenged by the lack of marine funding in New Zealand, in March 2024, she chose to focus her work through F.L.O.W. Collaborative to advance i. culturally anchored marine management, ii. coastal habitat regeneration, and iii. significantly increased funding and financing of this work.

²⁶ www.moana.co.nz/responsibility

²⁷ www.sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/blue-economy-principles www.sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/developing-blue-economy-principles-for-new-zealand/#:~:text=Blue%20economy%20 principles%20(BE%20principles,examples%20include%20indigenous%20world%20views

Blue Economy Disclosures (2022) - www.sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/sustainability-disclosures-in-the-blue-economy/

28 Upholding the Value of Pāua Quota Final Report (2022-2023) - www.sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/upholding-the-value-of-p%C4%81ua-quota/#PageEnd

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