

Pacific Oceanscape

A Secure Future for Pacific Island Nations Based on Ocean Conservation and Management

By The Republic of Kiribati

President Aote Tong

I. Purpose:

A summary briefing document for President Aote Tong (Kiribati) to use as a country initiative announcement at the Pacific Leaders Forum (4-7 August 2009, Cairns Australia).

II. Next steps:

Following review, amendment as needed and endorsement by Kiribati, officials need to notify the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) of this Kiribati country initiative at the PPAC meeting (14-15 July 2009) or soon thereafter.

III. Desired goal:

Kiribati announces the Pacific Oceanscape and component Pacific Ocean Arcs at the 2009 Pacific Leaders Forum with an invitation for collaboration in this initiative consistent with the Pacific Plan and the Forum Leaders Ocean Policy. Kiribati, with the support from Conservation International, can further develop this concept for partnership and resourcing at the Regional Marine Managed Areas Meeting (November, 2009, French Polynesia).

IV. Rationale

Ocean conservation and management is the preeminent issue of our time and our region. Pacific Island people have depended on the ocean and its resources for millennia. But with rising sea levels, declining fishery resources, warming ocean temperatures, and pollution, the oceans are now changing rapidly in ways that our ancestors could not imagine, and in ways that degrade our people's lives and threaten our existence. The time has come for our region to join together and face common threats to the ocean, a resource that moves between our communities and that we share like the atmosphere we breathe. The time has come for a new Pacific Ocean vision as demonstrated by the **Pacific Oceanscape**.

Kiribati recognizes and applauds the efforts made for conservation and the environment through the innovative Micronesia Challenge and more recently the Coral Triangle Initiative. Kiribati further recognizes that the central Pacific, including islands of southern Micronesia and Polynesia, has had comparatively little attention or investment for protected area development and related environment initiatives. Kiribati believes the time is appropriate to address this imbalance as the central Pacific contains some of the most pristine and robust coral reefs, islands and marine systems remaining in the world today. To this end Kiribati is also announcing a companion **Pacific Ocean Arc** initiative to help provide focus and investment in this part of the Pacific region.

Further Kiribati believes that Forum leadership is needed to unite these conservation and sustainable development initiatives across the region, to ensure for example that learning and collaboration is maximized, and a **Pacific Oceanscape** could provide a framework for Forum Leadership and cooperation in this regard.

A **Pacific Oceanscape** could extend from Micronesia, Melanesia and throughout Polynesia , noting the opportunity for the Pacific Oceanscape to traverse tropical and temperate systems from Hawaii to New Zealand. Active partnership within the Oceanscape and more widely with Micronesia Challenge and Coral Triangle Pacific states would be strongly fostered. The **Pacific Oceanscape** would encompass millions of square kilometers of life sustaining ocean. Within this region we can look at all peoples, islands, ocean resources and problems in a shared framework, the Pacific Ocean, which is the context of our lives, our livelihoods and our collective future. This project will respect our cultural differences and national sovereignty, but we will identify and solve common problems, and will seek funding expertise and resources from common partners. Together, we will be stronger and more convincing on ocean issues than separately. If we are able to rise up and meet this challenge, as a community connected by this great ocean, we will prosper in our economic security, food security, climate security, and cultural security.

Kiribati sees this key opportunity for a **Pacific Oceanscape** that gives due recognition and profile to the islands that have long sustained our peoples. Scientists, donors, and countries outside our region now understand the global importance of the ocean. They understand that the oceans are like the lungs of our planet because they produce most of the oxygen from tiny ocean plants, that the oceans are the primary climate regulator for earth holding most of the heat and 50 times more carbon than the atmosphere, and that the oceans provide protein for one out of every four person on earth each day. If we join together, we can align with this new global view of the oceans and we have one fantastic advantage: most of the world's ocean is in the Pacific and most of the Pacific is in our region.

In recent years a variety of innovative and important ocean conservation and management initiatives have emerged in the Pacific, including the Micronesia Challenge, The Phoenix Islands Protected Area, the United States Pacific Islands Marine Monuments, the Nauru Agreement, the Coral Triangle Initiative, and many others. The **Pacific Oceanscape** potentially provides a larger framework, consistent with Pacific Forum Leaders 2006 Ocean Policy, to look at all of these initiatives together, understand their connectivity, and help us plan additional coordinated activities, science and projects in the future that make one cohesive whole.

In essence the Pacific Oceanscape demonstrates at scale a new level ocean stewardship in the heart of the Pacific Ocean.

V. Key elements of President Tong's announcement:

Kiribati announces its intention to develop a Pacific Oceanscape that:

- **Creates a series of Pacific Ocean Arcs** - these are based on the natural island archipelago nature of the Pacific, inclusive of land, sea inclusive of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). These Arcs embody a focus on integrated marine and terrestrial protected area development and the overall conservation and sustainable development of some of the world's most pristine and remote coral reef based marine ecosystems. These Pacific Ocean Arcs are the building blocks or foundation units of an Oceanscape. This component seeks to address the investment needed for protected areas in particular in the central Pacific but potentially more widely across the Oceanscape. They will notably assist states meet their commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- **Kiribati announces the first two Pacific Ocean Arcs** in the programme – the Phoenix Islands and Line Islands Ocean Arcs. Kiribati warmly invites the United States of America to develop collaborative management of these entire island archipelago systems so to ensure Arc integrity. For its part Kiribati has established the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) covering from than 400,000 sq km and recognizes that the USA possessions of Howland and Baker Islands, the remaining two Phoenix Islands are now part of the new USA Pacific Marine National Monuments. Kiribati is currently assessing protected area needs in its Line Islands as well as addressing key threats such as invasive species and recognizes that the remaining USA possessions of Kingman Reef, Palmyra Atoll and Jarvis Island are now also part of the USA Pacific Marine National Monument. A key gap is to develop effective co-management, cooperation and peer learning across these two Pacific Ocean Arcs to ensure the Phoenix and Line Islands in their entirety remain two of the most pristine coral reef archipelagos remaining in the world today.
- **Kiribati warmly invites other Pacific States to join** and work together to develop and expand the Pacific Ocean Arc concept and notes the opportunity for discussions at the forthcoming Regional Marine Areas Meeting in French Polynesia in November 2009. Expansion in this way will readdress the current imbalance and relative lack of investment in protected areas in the Pacific.
- **Kiribati invites interested Forum partners, donors, inter and non government organizations** to join and support this effort through partnership, capacity building and resourcing.
- **Kiribati acknowledges Conservation International(CI) and New England Aquarium (NEAq)** as foundation partners in the Phoenix Islands Ocean Arc and further welcomes the commitment of Conservation International and NEAq to provide expertise, training and resources for this initiative.
- **Kiribati recognizes that to build component Pacific Ocean Arcs to a Pacific Oceanscape** will also require:
 - Effectively addressing High Seas management, including the creation of High Seas Marine Protected Areas,
 - Effectively addressing tuna management, Kiribati will continue to pursue this through its membership of regional fisheries agreements and agencies, in particular the third Nauru Arrangement and new measures including 100% observer coverage on DWFN vessels,
 - Effectively addressing the impacts of global climate change, including ensuring that island state's Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) are not compromised by sea level rise as a key measure of ensuring island state economic security from fisheries license income,
 - Effectively addressing migratory and threatened species conservation needs within Arcs and the Oceanscape reflecting more truly these species ranges and needs,
 - Effectively addressing investment and ongoing sustainable financing for Arc and Oceanscape management and cooperation,
 - Effectively developing collaboration, co-management across arcs and mutual learning with states; including those Pacific Forum members involved in the Coral Triangle Initiative and the Micronesia Challenge.
- **Kiribati calls on all members of the Pacific Islands Forum and associated regional agencies** to support the development of the Pacific Ocean Arc programme building to realize an effectively managed Pacific Oceanscape in our region that will provide

impetus for increased leadership and cooperation for the entire Pacific Ocean and ocean management globally.