



## GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express the sincere gratitude of the Government and People of the Cook Island for our participation here, at this 6th GEF Assembly. I would like to thank the Global Environment Facility for organizing this meeting and express our appreciation to the significant work already carried out by the GEF in our region and express our confidence in the continuation of GEF engagement with the Cook Islands.

I would like also to express our deepest appreciation to the Government and People of Vietnam for hosting this meeting and providing the opportunity for all of us to work together for protection of our planet and a sustainable future.

We appreciate the efforts of the GEF to serve as a financing mechanism for several multilateral environmental agreements and in doing so play a significant role in the implementation of these globally agreed Environmental Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, POPs, UNCCD and the Minamata Convention).

We recognize the relevance of the GEF 2020 vision, and continued focus on addressing drivers of environmental degradation, supporting innovative and scalable activities and delivering the highest impacts cost-effectively. We maintain that addressing the drivers of environmental degradation, pursuing integrated solutions, enhancing resilience and adaptation, ensuring complementarities and synergies, especially in climate finance, will help the Environmental Conventions in achieving their goals with support from the GEF.

It should come as no surprise to countries present here that climate change risks, aggravated by human activities, is at the forefront of the Cook Islands concerns. We witness changes occurring in our environment that have no basis in recorded history or culture. The frequency and intensity of cyclonic events in our region are unsettling and catastrophic for those who bear the brunt of nature's response to the Anthropocene. The acidification and warming of our Pacific Ocean has resulted in the bleaching of coral reefs across our region, reducing the resilience of local communities and livelihoods and placing national development and future sustainability at risk.

The Pacific has led the charge to better manage our oceans, with support of the GEF, the Pacific continues to demonstrate leadership, stewardship and cultural maintenance of our marine resources through the establishment of large-scale marine protected and managed areas. We look

to continuing these efforts and scale-up towards transboundary management of these areas. As we progress this effort, we are challenged with the vast amounts of plastic waste and marine debris being found in the Pacific Oceans and finding its way into the complex food chains located in this environment. These observations of nature continue to justify the importance of changing our approach to the environment to ensure that we strengthen our resilience and that of the planet towards 2020 and look to build upon this in the GEF post-2020 strategy.

The Cook Islands appreciates the continuation of the GEF's funding System of Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) with funds for 3 focal areas (biodiversity, climate change and land degradation) allocated to each country. The Cook Islands acknowledges with appreciation the special treatment and recognition given to LDC's and SIDS, regardless of national economic status. To build on this post 2020, the Cook Islands would ask that the GEF revise the allocation formula to take into consideration the vulnerability and exposure to environmental degradation and impacts from climate change of LDCs and SIDS, something that is not yet considered in the current formula. Both LDCs and SIDS are constrained with scarce resources and prospects, low capacity and populations strongly reliant on a healthy local environment for their livelihoods. Despite these significant constraints, LDCs and SIDS have aspirations to develop, with some SIDS now looking at graduating to middle or upper income status. However in the event of a single category-5 cyclone, all of this development can be set back many years overnight. We strongly believe that if this vulnerability risk is considered and reflected in the allocation formula this would better protect and provide several SIDS like ours with tangible measures to not only mitigate but rebuild our communities in the wake of such shocks. It is regrettable that allocations across portfolios has decreased from previous years, but we accept the challenge to maximize value and create the 'biggest impact' with what we are given.

The Cook Islands also notes the consideration of "investment mobilized" under the Co-financing agenda item and note the special treatment applied to LDCs and SIDS. We commend the GEF's efforts to increase resources towards the achievement of global benefits however we feel there needs to be greater clarity on what investment mobilized means, particularly should this become a broader requirement for all GEF projects in the future.

We applaud the efforts of the GEF with regard to the GEF Gender Implementation Strategy. Men and Women are equal but not identical, excellence is not determined by gender. If GEF wants to deliver with excellence, it needs excellent people and we believe this strategy is an important step towards achieving this. The engagement and participation in the GEF of the Private Sector is an important step in the development of the GEF and the delivery of its mandate. A clear and concise terms of reference for a Private Sector advisory group is required to ensure that the group provides adequate and relevant advice in accordance with the GEF mandate. We would also like to reiterate the point made by several Council members on the need for balanced representation and that the GEF strongly considers representation from the private sector from a Small Island Developing States to contribute to the primary function of this advisory group

Finally we would like to emphasize the importance of the GEF Small Grant Programme (SGP), working through community groups to create global environmental and sustainable development benefits through community based actions. The Programme continues to remain highly responsive to local and national needs and priorities and mobilize communities towards shared environmental goals. The GEF SGP despite being only recently re-established in the Cook Islands has been successfully implementing activities in several islands of the Cook Islands and has delivered benefits

through joint planning and programming with community grant programmes delivered through Adaptation Fund resources. We welcome the further continuation of the Small Grant Programme and look to strengthening the SGP partnership within our country.

On behalf of my Government and people, I would like to encourage the GEF to continue its good engagement with the Cook Islands, to work with us to be inspirational, innovative and relevant.

Thank you

---

6<sup>TH</sup> Assembly of the Global Environment Facility  
27 to 29 June 2018  
Da Nang, Vietnam