



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
HON MARK BROWN
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Opening remarks at the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth
Deep Seabed Environmental Management & Monitoring
Workshop

26 JULY 2021

Kia Orana Excellency's, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Warm greetings from the Government and people of the Cook Islands.

It is my great pleasure to deliver these opening remarks at this Regional Training and Capacity Building Workshop on Deep Seabed Environmental Management and Monitoring hosted by the Cook Islands.

We would have been delighted to give a warm Pacific welcome to everyone in person, but we are still grateful that this workshop is able to proceed remotely, and that our Rarotonga-based participants can meet in person.

I would like to thank the International Seabed Authority, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Government of Norway for their support through the Abyssal Initiative project and in the organisation of this workshop.

I am pleased to note that we will also hear from the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum, currently headed by my friend and our former Prime Minister Henry Puna.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of the Pacific Islands Development Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme as well as regional civil society organisations.

It is a great pleasure to also welcome our Pacific Island brothers and sisters from Kiribati, Nauru, and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Let me also thank our presenters from around the world who are sharing their expertise as well as the Seabed Minerals Authority and the officials who helped organise this workshop.

I am pleased to see a high level of participation from the Cook Islands. The inclusion of our key stakeholders, including government, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, and of course our Advisory Committee is a testament to the importance of ongoing inclusive and transparent engagement with all involved. This will help raise our collective awareness and knowledge, so that we as a country can better engage in seabed related issues.

We in the Cook Islands, and across the Pacific – are a people of the ocean. What we call our Moana Nui o Kiva, it is our lifeblood. It provides us with food, income and prosperity, and it is part of our identity. It is also the foundation of our Blue Economy.

We take its stewardship and management seriously, ensuring that we proceed with caution to allow both the conservation and the sustainable use of our marine resources.

This includes seabed minerals, where again the Pacific region has been at the forefront of developing a sustainable deep-sea minerals industry, based on the precautionary approach and the promotion of good governance.

Through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, we have a sound and rigorous legal regime with environmental protection front and centre.

In the international seabed area, we are steadfast in our support of the Authority's efforts. Collectively, we are putting in place the regulatory frameworks and processes needed to ensure the sustainable and responsible development of seabed minerals for the benefit of all humanity. All of this, before any mining has been approved.

This workshop is yet another step towards our collective engagement to ensure the sound and sustainable management of deep seabed minerals within and beyond our national jurisdictions.

Now, in order to achieve our Blue Economy objectives, and meet our governance responsibilities under the Convention – it is of critical importance that we, as Pacific Island Sponsoring States, have the necessary capacities to do so.

As such, the continuing development of our people is a key priority.

In this regard, I commend the ongoing efforts of the Authority to build and develop the capabilities of Pacific Islands sponsoring States to ensure our

active engagement in all its activities. This fourth workshop of the Abyssal Initiative Project is an example of this commitment.

My government will continue to support the Abyssal Initiative Project and I look forward to strengthening our cooperation to ensure that more opportunities for training and technical assistance are provided in this emerging sector.

I wish you all a productive week of dialogue and learning.

God bless and Kia Manuia