



## **High-Level 12th Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum in Asia-Pacific Cook Islands statement**

**Kia Orana, and warm greetings from the Government and people of the Cook Islands.**

- It is a privilege to deliver these remarks in this beautiful city of Jaipur, India, for the Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum.
- Allow me to also express our gratitude to the people and government of India for their hospitality, and to the Secretariat and the team for its diligent preparations for this crucial session
- The Cook Islands, like many other nations, is at the frontline of biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution. The people of the Pacific islands are stewards of the world's largest ocean—we are Large Ocean States.
- I have traveled here from Aitutaki, my homeland, with a landmass of 18km<sup>2</sup>, and where the threats of environmental degradation directly impact our ecosystems, food security, health, and well-being.
- Given that 96 percent of our region is the Pacific Ocean, it is at the heart of our geography, cultures, and economies. We have the enormous responsibility of stewardship to ensure that we, our children, and future generations continue to benefit from all of the ocean's bounty. This mutual relationship is under threat like never before.
- This year, we mark the 60th anniversary of our self-governance—a time to reflect on the progress made and the challenges ahead.
- We reflect on our forefathers who lived in harmony with their environment and that fifty years ago, on 15 September 1975, we enacted the Conservation Act, our first legislation to manage the environment.
- We do not have the luxury of large landmasses for landfills and so managing our waste is imperative. Since the Conservation Act 1975, we have expanded our scope from the 3Rs to the 5Rs—Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, and Recycle—ensuring a more comprehensive approach to waste management.
- The recent development of our Solid and Hazardous Waste Bill further strengthens our national efforts in this area.
- Our National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ and National Environment Policy 2022-2032 outline a zero-waste target under Goal 4—managing solid and hazardous waste.
- Recycling is a key component of our strategy to achieve the aspiration of 'zero waste.'



- A total of 27.15% is being recycled on the island of Rarotonga, while a huge percentage of 73% remains as other waste. We can assume general waste includes organic waste and e-waste.
- The Cook Islands strategic partnerships with organizations such as Coca-Cola and Moana Taka have enabled recyclables to be shipped out of the Cook Islands.
- We are currently implementing a Legacy Waste Project, which has seen 286,101 kgs of legacy waste have been removed from Rarotonga and my island Aitutaki.
- We hope to expand the removal of recyclable waste from the rest of our 15 islands and are engaged in ongoing projects under PacWaste and GEF-7, focusing on recycling systems and central waste collection sites.
- Further, the Cook Islands have engaged with the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic, with a strong focus on the upstream and midstream stages of the plastics lifecycle. This aligns with our preparations for the GEF-8 project.
- The GEF-8 project's objective is to reduce the amount of plastic entering the Cook Islands through the food and beverage sector while fostering an environment that supports reuse options and other circular solutions.
- By doing so, we aim to ease the burden on the Cook Islands' waste management system and mitigate pollution and the harmful effects of plastic.
- Due to size and isolation, disposal of rubbish has significant costs—both environmentally and financially—and therefore our focus needs to be on reducing the amount and nature of waste entering our country, as well as ending in our single landfill, which is filling far too quickly.
- We also want to learn more about investment in circular business models. We acknowledge that the linear model of 'take-make-use-disregard' has reached its limits.
- While there is general support and action on waste management systems and implementation across sectors, we face practical challenges such as resource limitations, technical expertise gaps, and community compliance.
- Nonetheless, the Cook Islands is committed to delivering innovative and sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. Through enhanced collaboration, capacity building, and the integration of traditional knowledge with modern science, we want to walk the path of the 5Rs and circular economy movement.
- This is not just a government responsibility—it is a global call to action. We all need an economy that is sustainable, resilient, climate neutral and nature positive. That economy is a circular economy.
- Thank you for your attention. Kia Orana e kia Manuia.