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Implementation of oceans Sustainable Development Goal 14 in Pacific small developing states

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Abstract:

Marine water of good quality is essential for the economic, environmental and socio-economic well-being of Pacific Small Island Developing States (“SIDS”). After achieving independence, SIDS have depended heavily upon marine resources for revenue. Some Pacific SIDS derive revenues from licences given to distant-nation fishing boats; in others that lack fishing capacity, joint ventures have been formed with distant nations. Ocean-fishing venues need sustainable practices and unpolluted ocean waters in order to maintain productivity of fish species. For other SIDS, aquaculture (such as black pearls) and tourism are significant, together with subsistence fishing. Good inshore water quality in lagoons and coastal zones is a key factor for aesthetic surroundings, and to ensure food security.

Marine pollution is largely derived from land-based activities, and Pacific SIDS need to limit transfer of wastes to surrounding lagoons and oceans. Measures include environmentally sound disposal of the large volumes of waste associated with tourism (in particular plastic food packaging); wastewater; and leachate from recent landfills. Other marine pollution, such as the mercury vapour produced by coal-fired power generation is transported far from its origins and deposited by rainfall into the ocean. Here, it is transformed by methylation into methylmercury, which is taken up by migratory fish, and those who eat them. Recent work shows that Pacific SIDS people have high levels of methylmercury in their body, a potential health threat.

Recent proposals to bring, deep seabed minerals to the surface, “de-water” them *in situ*, and return the wastewater to the seabed is alarming. Films of the remote-control vehicles used for such mining show plumes of disturbed matter rising from the seabed, arousing concerns for neighbouring jurisdictions. Among Pacific SIDS communities, a prior, informed consent process is needed to ensure inclusive, meaningful consultations about development, to safeguard marine ecosystems and human health and implement Oceans SDG-14.