



TE KAUNONO TUTARA E TE MANA TIAKI
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Opening Statement for the Presentation of Cook Islands Revised Submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Commission,

On behalf of our Government and people of the Cook Islands, I extend to you warm pacific greetings, Kia Orana.

I am unable to be present before you today, but I trust that you will have a constructive and fruitful exchange with our Cook Islands in-person delegation.

With the support of our whole nation, we are very pleased and humbled to present our revised submission to this distinguished Commission. We value this opportunity to highlight the work we have undertaken to revise our submission, and our expectation for a fair and science-based consideration by the Sub-Commission next week. This is an opportunity that we do not take for granted, thank you.

Chair, and distinguished members of the Commission, the Cook Islands acknowledges the important work of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. We recognize the demanding workload on its members and we also recognize the significant challenges and constraints on resources and time placed on it.

Almost fifty years ago, in 1974, the Cook Islands first Prime Minister, Sir Albert Henry, addressed the third United Nations conference on the Law of the Sea, where he shared our Country's aspirations for the proposed Constitution for the Ocean. Now, as a State Party to UNCLOS, and more particularly as a Pacific Small Islands Developing State, we continue to place the utmost value on the principles and rights enshrined in the Convention.

Fourteen years ago, in 2009, our then Deputy Prime Minister Sir Terepai Maoate had the honour of presenting our original submission in accordance with Article 76, paragraph 8 of UNCLOS. This marked the beginning of our voyage to delineate, within the criteria set forth in Article 76, the outer limits of our continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles and to demonstrate what UNCLOS establishes as our continental shelf entitlement as a coastal state. We went through some turbulent storms, but staunch voyagers of the sea that we are, we maintained our direction and we have now led our vaka to the shores of this Commission once again with a revised submission.

Chair, today it is my turn, and my honour, to fulfil my Country's continued aspirations.

For a Large Ocean State like ours, hailing from the Blue Pacific Continent, a collection of 15 tiny islands scattered over nearly 2 million square kilometers of Ocean, this is no easy feat. Despite the multiple challenges that our Government and our people continue to face, we hold this revised submission close to our heart.

Allow me to recall one of our Polynesian legends, one of the famous warrior and fisherman named Maui, who fished the island of Manihiki and brought it to the surface - pulling it from the seabed like a tree, its roots anchored and spreading throughout the seabed below. We can almost picture it today, the Island sitting atop the vast plateau of elevations, banks and spurs that make up the Manihiki Plateau.

Thus, for the Cook Islands, the significance of this revised submission cannot be overstated. We remain increasingly vulnerable economically and environmentally, and as the challenges outside our paradise continue to grow, we are learning rapidly to strengthen our own resolve and management of our resources to ensure the preservation of our country for present and future generations.

The holistic management of our land and ocean is a collective responsibility that we do not take lightly. We have always been proud voyagers and stewards of our ocean, ensuring that we proceed with caution to enable both the conservation and the sustainable use of our marine resources. Our continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles represents the opportunity to continue our voyage, this time taking us beneath the ocean. We are excited at the prospects of undertaking this voyage of discovery to improve our knowledge and understanding of our deep ocean.

We are not alone on this journey of discovery. As the current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, I look forward to supporting the creation of the Pacific Centre for Excellence on Deep Ocean Science, which will be based at the University of the South Pacific Campus of the Cook Islands. The footage obtained in our submission area by NOAA research vessels highlighted incredible biodiversity and the immense potential of this area for contributing to the pool of scientific knowledge of all humankind. In this way, we see this submission as benefitting more than just our nation.

Chair, allow me to conclude by commending the excellent partnerships that have made our revised submission possible. My people and I are truly grateful. Chair, I wish to reiterate the importance that my Government places in supporting the work of this Commission, and assure members that we remain committed to ensuring that it is able to do its work effectively and expeditiously. I thank you all for your time and attention, and wish you Kia Orana e Kia Manuia