

Fact Sheet

Strengthening the Global Plastics Treaty with Indigenous Pacific People's Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

The global plastics treaty (GPT) mandates the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to create binding rules based on the best available science, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems (Res 5/14). The knowledge and practices of Indigenous Pacific Island Peoples are deeply rooted in a respectful and mutual co-existence with the natural world. New materials, products, and technologies offer advantages, yet bring pollutants that were not present pre-colonization. Plastic pollution harms sustainability, ecosystems, culture, economies, health, and well-being. Polymers and petrochemicals are not produced in the region. Nevertheless, Pacific Islands communities are severely impacted by plastic pollution from the increasing volumes of plastics entering the region via trade, tourism, fishing, and tidal flows - and never leaving.

Terms like *vanua*, *fenua*, *hanua*, *fanua*, and *whenua* used across the region denote strong cultural and spiritual bonds between people and place. In Indigenous Fijian belief, *vanua* involves three connections: territorial (*qe*le) land, social kinship (*veiwekani*), and cosmological dimensions (*yavutu* and *vū*). These holistic worldviews serve to address plastic pollution in its fullest relational, ethical, and most complex way. It is this systems approach to plastic pollution that is vital, and yet currently lacking in GPT negotiations. A translated summary of an Indigenous Palauan chant exemplifies their role as protective of the natural world: 'We are transiting this earth. We are, in a way, trespassers and we really don't own what is here. We don't own the land, the trees, the forest, the water. It is only the rocks and the water and the core of the earth that own the land. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure its continuity into the future'. This chant describes a very different relationship to the human-centred and extractive relationship of non-Indigenous industrial societies.



Figure 1: Vaka Moana (The Seafaring Canoe)

Indigenous Pacific Peoples' emphasis on the interdependence of human, non-humans, and ecosystems offer unique insights into the **full life cycle** of plastics that cannot be appreciated by non-Indigenous negotiators.

Indigenous Pacific Islanders offer vital insights into effective waste prevention, sustainable environmental management, and the development of a circular bioeconomy. Their perspective is crucial for a comprehensive and effective GPT.

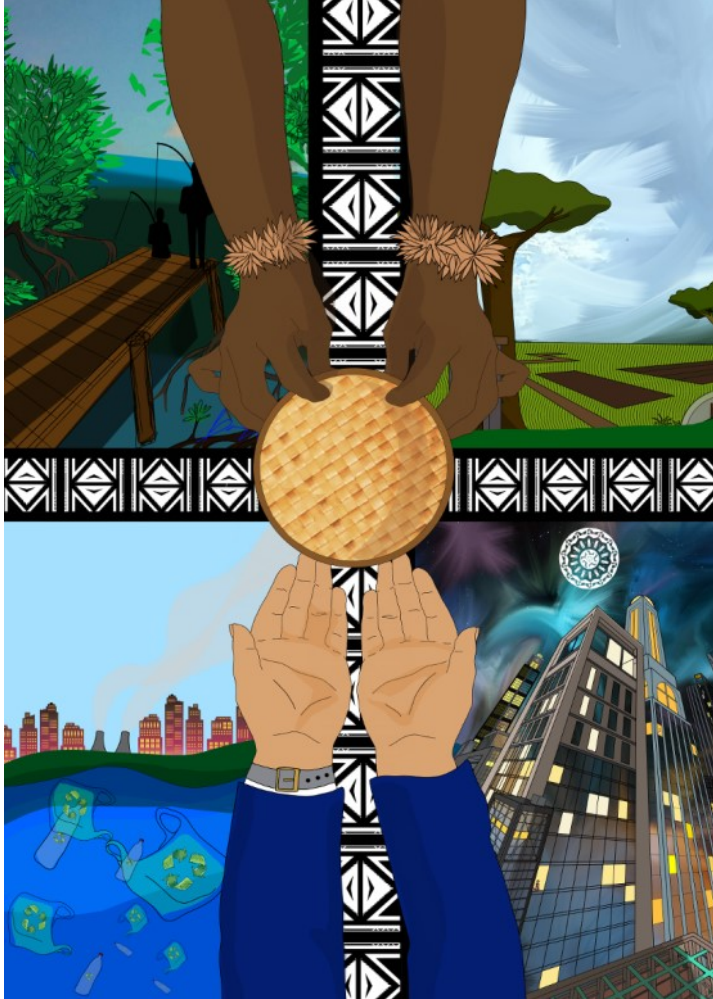


Figure 2: Veivosaki (The Discussion)

The Pacific employs regional conventions and frameworks to honour Indigenous rights. These regional mechanisms should be drawn on to support Pacific Indigenous input in the INCs, intersessionals, and treaty Conference of Parties (COPs).

[Pacific Islands Declaration on the Prevention of Plastic Pollution and its Impacts](#) :

*“Stressing the importance of incorporating **Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations** that have evolved through generations into nature-based solutions for the sustainable conservation of ecosystems.”*

*“Emphasize that **Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Practices, and Innovations** must be an integral part of the solution to the plastics crisis.”*

- [Pacific Regional Framework for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture](#)
- [Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration](#)
- [Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights.](#)

Some important Indigenous Pacific Islands Peoples’ contributions INC negotiations:

- Ensure ecosystems thrive so humans can survive.
- Strengthen culture, well-being, livelihoods, and resilience.
- Respect long-term intergenerational knowledge in place.
- Ensure intra- and intergenerational equity and justice.
- Promote integrated, relational, and holistic worldviews (systems approach).
- Share Indigenous science, knowledge and practices with free, prior, and informed consent.
- Support equitable and inclusive processes, practices, and outcomes.
- Protect the rights and concerns of diverse Indigenous Pacific Islanders.
- Promote zero-waste, safe, restorative materials, products and systems.
- Boost local economies supportive of safe, sustainable, and essential substitutes for plastics.
- Halt harmful and non-essential plastics trade and manufacturing in the region.
- Reject unsafe and unsustainable waste management technologies.

Indigenous Pacific Islanders’ roles are vital in shaping and implementing the GPT and they will greatly contribute to science-policy interfaces. However, they will need support to secure their full, meaningful and empowering participation in the INCs, intersessionals, and the COPs.

In the words of a Vanuatuan oral tradition: “Let’s draw our bows back to the past to better reach toward our target in the future”.



Figure 3: “Heke” (The Octopus connecting Pasifika Communities via the Ocean)

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific are disproportionately affected by plastic pollution because they are located in a region that receives a large amount of plastic waste from other countries due to ocean currents and trade patterns.

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific have been managing and protecting their ocean for thousands of years, using their traditional knowledge, practices, and values.

- Plastic pollution also undermines the sovereignty and self-determination of indigenous peoples in the Pacific, who have been subjected to colonialism, exploitation, and marginalization for centuries.

- Plastic pollution threatens the health and well-being of indigenous peoples in the Pacific by contaminating their marine resources, damaging their ecosystems, and disrupting their traditional practices.

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific have been leading the way in finding solutions to plastic pollution, such as banning single-use plastics, promoting circular economies, and implementing community-based initiatives.

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific have a deep connection to the ocean, which is central to their culture, spirituality, livelihoods, and food security.

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific have been calling for a global treaty on plastic pollution that recognizes their rights, perspectives, and contributions, and that addresses the entire life cycle of plastics from production to disposal.

- Indigenous peoples in the Pacific have been advocating for a global treaty on plastic pollution that includes elements such as national action plans, binding targets, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, financial and technical support, and public participation.

Acknowledgement

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