



## GOVERNING COUNCIL 36<sup>th</sup> SESSION

Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga  
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AGENDA ITEM	TITLE
11	ESTABLISHMENT and ADMINISTRATION
11.1	Regional Institutional Framework

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### Purpose of the Paper

To update Council members on the Communiqué of the recent 38<sup>th</sup> Forum Meeting held in Tonga, 16-17<sup>th</sup> of October, in respect of the Regional Institutional Framework (RIF).

### Background

Paper AS36/11.1 provides background to the developments in regard to the RIF from when Council last met to the recent pre-Forum meetings of the Pacific Plan Action Committee, RIF Taskforce, and FOC, in Tonga. In the Communiqué, paragraph 19 refers to the RIF, and in particular 19b to SOPAC.

*“the need to rationalise the functions of the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) with the work programmes of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP”.*

Subsequently, the Secretariat advised SOPAC National Representatives of this decision (Circular 26/07, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007) and of its intention to prepare a paper for Council to consider in regard to SOPAC's response to the Leaders decision.

Consequently, the attached paper contains a brief overview of the background information in order to demonstrate and suggest a way forward for SOPAC Council as they prepare to respond to the Leaders decision.

In summary, Council may consider responding positively and constructively to the challenge presented by the Leaders decision.

### Recommendation

Council consider the supplementary paper and endorse its conclusions and recommendations.

# Supplementary Paper to Council for agenda item AS36/11.1

## Regional Institutional Framework (RIF)

### Executive Summary

This paper is a presentation of events as well as some of the principles which led to the decision by the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum (16-17<sup>th</sup> October 2007) in respect of the Regional Institutional Framework:

(a) the inclusion of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) into Pillar 1, in order to recognise the Agency's central regional role and to provide fisheries issues with the political profile they require;

**(b) the need to rationalise the functions of the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) with the work programmes of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP;**

(c) the South Pacific Bureau for Education Assessment (SPBEA) merging into SPC; and

(d) the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Fiji School of Medicine forming part of Pillar 3 (Education).”

Paragraph 19(b) of this decision is both regionally generic as well as a unique event for SOPAC, and the challenges and implications of this decision are fully discussed in the paper.

The SOPAC Governing Council had considered the RIF issue in its 35<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Honiara in 2006, at that time it was being recommended that a single technical organisation be established through the amalgamation of SOPAC with SPC, SPREP, FFA and SPBEA. The outcome was that Council directed the Chair to write to the Chair of FOC advising “there was no consensus on the issue” and Council was concerned with the following:

- The lack of clarity and assurance that improved delivery at national level of SOPAC's work programme and services would eventuate from implementing the report recommendations.
- The lack of clarity surrounding the governance, establishment and operation arrangements of the proposed new single technical organisation of which SOPAC would become a part, this includes legal and constitutional issues relating to SOPAC.
- The implication on SOPAC with regard to the potential risk of losing the progress made over the past three decades.
- SOPAC is nearing completion of a review and re-direction of SOPAC and its work programme that has taken 5-6 years, and the date for implementation of the report recommendations of 1st January 2009 was considered by some Council members as overly ambitious, and should remain very flexible,.
- The report does not address the implications for changes in membership in regard to enhancing work programme delivery and being cost effective.

It was also Council's view that “it was their responsibility to continue normal activities of SOPAC until directed otherwise by the Leaders”.

The Leaders in making their decision did not specify who should lead on “the need to rationalise the functions of SOPAC with the work programmes of SPC and SPREP with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP”. It is suggested that in honouring the Leaders decision and considering the central part to be played by SOPAC, that SOPAC

Council should take a positive and constructive step and lead the regional response to the Leader's decision.

There are, of course, many issues of concern some of which were raised in Council last year and are discussed in the paper. There are also more generic issues but these should be considered more fully in due course.

Responding to and implementing the Forum Leaders decision constructively and positively involves the recognition of and adhering to, at the least four objects or principles. These are:

- (i) improving quality of service
- (ii) improving effectiveness of delivery
- (iii) more effective management of limited resources.
- (iv) good governance

These principles are critical to the whole rationalisation process and essential for a successful and appropriate rationalisation exercise.

Perhaps the least recognised of these principles in the rationalisation process is good governance especially manifested in transparency and accountability. In the suggested process for the way forward SOPAC Council, fully cognisant of one of the four Pillars in the Pacific Plan – Governance.

The other three principles could be said to be part of the other three Pillars: Economic Growth, Sustainable Development and Security.

The good governance principle is recognised by all Pacific island countries and donor partners as central. For example, the Forum Leaders Auckland Declaration and the Pacific Plan and a phenomena that cannot and or should not be forgotten even in the interest of an organisational or political goal. Just as the SOPAC Governing Council must take heed of the Forum Leaders decision, so should the Forum Leaders recognise that there is a SOPAC Governing Council with professional expertise and legal responsibility to exercise sole authority on SOPAC matters. In pursuit of its positive and constructive response to the Forum Leaders decision the SOPAC Secretariat must follow procedure and seek SOPAC Council's approval. Moreover in implementing the Leaders decision the process must be transparent and actions accountable.

The way forward process suggested in this paper is based on all the four principles listed above. Above all it is based on the premise that even if principles (i), (ii) and (iii) are achieved, the implementation process will not be credible if principle (iv) is not one of the parameters of the rationalisation process.

In **conclusion** Council:

(i) Noted that the core business of SOPAC is excellence in applied scientific and technical information and knowledge of earth systems, and demonstrating how this knowledge contributes to sustainable development for its island members.

(ii) Noted that SOPAC has grown substantially over the past 35 years in many aspects into a well-established, and well respected regional organisation serving its Pacific Island members in developing natural resources, principally non-living resources, in a sustainable manner and strengthening resilience through integrated solutions in its three programme areas: Ocean and Islands management, Community Lifelines development and Community Risk management.

(iii) Recognised that partners currently identify with SOPAC to the extent that the Commission now enjoys a substantial, secure annual budget which includes the attraction of non-traditional "new" money to support service delivery to its members.

(iv) Recognised further that throughout its existence the Commission has regularly been “reviewed” in regard to its future, its role, and its direction, to which it has responded positively and emerged with improved and strengthened of services to its members.

(v) Noted further that whilst the 2007 Leaders Communiqué does not call for a review of SOPAC, it in fact goes further to suggest radical changes to SOPAC, but is not supported by any evidence of due diligence and consideration by members during the RIF process.

(vi) Acknowledged with concern that circumstances such as this increase demands on the Secretariat, and cause stress on the staff, that will impact current levels of service delivery.

(vii) Nonetheless, is fully cognisant of the need to maintain the momentum established by the Leaders decision, in order to ensure the continuity in both the quality and effective delivery of service in meeting the needs of the people.

(viii) Recognised the critical need to adhere to at least the four principles of : improving quality of service; improving effectiveness of delivery; more effective management of limited resources; and good governance; not only for a successful and appropriate rationalisation outcome as well as to maintain and re-enforce the internationally recognised positive high profile image of our Leaders, and of the SOPAC Governing Council.

Council therefore:

**Agreed** to accept the challenge offered by the 2007 Leaders Communique which states “the need to rationalise the functions of SOPAC with the work programmes of SPC and SPREP, with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP”.

**Recommends** the following course of action as a way forward in responding to the Leaders decision.

(i) A consultative process be established between SOPAC, SPC and SPREP and the final report mutually agreed upon by the three organisations be submitted for consideration by the Forum in 2010 for final agreement and implementation to begin.

(ii) During the consultative process some of the issues to be considered will include:

- Proposing possible options for rationalisation and possible organisational models for the new arrangements taking into account realities such as the wider range of technical programmes, the possible rationalisation of certain common support services, the geographic location, and the membership differences.
- Examining the costs and benefits of the Leaders decision, the technical programmes, the memberships, and the external supporting agencies, identifying opportunities for improved service delivery.
- Proposing a realistic timing for implementation that would need to be taken into account including practical, legal, contractual obligations, and or any other problems that might require prior resolution as a result of absorption.

(iii) A progress report be submitted to the three governing councils and the Forum in 2008, and a draft final report in 2009.

(iv) While the consultative process is ongoing, SOPAC, SPC and SPREP design and develop from concept all new regional projects to demonstrate complementarity, a higher quality of work, and more effective delivery through cooperation and sharing of resources. The timeframe for this is early 2008 as a starting point especially in view of the SIS Summit decision.

(v) To respond to the Leaders decision, Council **agreed** that “a Committee of the SOPAC Council as a Whole”, supported by the Director and a small team be established and adequately resourced.

(vi) SPC and SPREP governing bodies be invited to fully engage in the consultative process.

**Agreed** to emphasise to all stakeholders, especially members, donor partners, and Secretariat staff, that in the interim the Commission would continue with its current work and efforts to secure resources for sustained service delivery under the direction and guidance of the Council.

**Agreed** to immediately respond by writing to the Forum Chair, and Chairs of SPC and SPREP governing bodies, advising of the outcomes of its consideration of the issue at the 2007 Council Meeting.

# Supplementary Paper to Council for agenda item AS36/11.1

## Regional Institutional Framework

### Purpose of this Paper

The Leaders Communique at the closure of the recent Pacific Islands Forum Meeting<sup>1</sup> considered the issue of the Regional Institutional Framework. The purpose of this brief position paper is to present background information, guidance and a suggested way forward for SOPAC Council as they prepare to consider the implications of the issues raised in the Leaders Communique, in respect of this matter.

It is not the intent of this paper to provide an in depth description or assessment of any aspect of the issues, nor express opinions. Rather, more simply, to draw together previously agreed statements which over the years serve to capture the importance of the issues raised, and the extent to which Council has responded to them in the past.

### Forum Communique on the Regional Institutional Framework (RIF), 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007

#### Eminent Persons Group Report

Council must remain mindful of the evolution of the RIF initiative. It began with the Eminent Persons Group Report (March 2004) on the Review of the Forum which stated; "We consider it a strength of the region that it includes a wide range of regional organisations with different roles and structures. CROP agencies reflect the diversity and rich history of the Pacific. We see no practical value in replacing these agencies with one "super organisation," as some have suggested." They suggested that as with all things improvement can be achieved and for CROP a review of its charter was necessary.

This review was completed and a revised CROP Charter was endorsed the following year, which indicated a key role of CROP was to take advantage of opportunities to pool and share expertise and resources to optimise benefits to member of CROP organisations.

#### Pacific Plan

In the Pacific Plan (2005), the RIF initiative is captured in the Leaders desire to give effect to their Vision through amongst other issues to "reform the Forum and regional institutional mechanism". The regional institutional mechanism has been addressed by 3 reports over the past two years (Hughes 2005, Tavola et al 2006, RIF Review Team 2007). The Tavola et al report which suggested a move to two organisations; (i) a single technical regional organisation (comprising SPC, SOPAC, SPREP, FFA and SPBEA), and (ii) the Forum Secretariat, was considered at the 2006 Forum. The Forum decided more work was needed and the suggested implementation date of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 remain open. From March to September 2007 a RIF Review Team of consultants working under the guidance of the SG, has reported to a RIF Review Taskforce comprising members of the Forum and members of SPC. The Taskforce provided a briefing to the recent Forum based upon the outcome of discussions amongst members at two meetings, one held in Nadi in June, the other in Nuku'alofa in September (see below).

In the recent Forum Communiqué, Leaders agreed to (Para 19):

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<sup>1</sup> The 38<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum was held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga 16-17<sup>th</sup> October, 2007. The Forum Communique is available on the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat website [www.forumsec.org](http://www.forumsec.org)

(a) the inclusion of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) into Pillar 1, in order to recognise the Agency's central regional role and to provide fisheries issues with the political profile they require;

**(b) the need to rationalise the functions of the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) with the work programmes of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP;**

(c) the South Pacific Bureau for Education Assessment (SPBEA) merging into SPC; and

(d) the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Fiji School of Medicine forming part of Pillar 3 (Education).”

### **The RIF Taskforce Briefing for Leaders, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

Prior to the Forum, the Chair of the RIF Taskforce wrote to the Forum Chair (Tonga), circulated as PIFS Circular 237, 25<sup>th</sup> September. The letter highlighted the concerns of the RIF Taskforce members in response to the RIF Consultants Team recommendations for implementation of the RIF and noted in particular as follows.

There was no consensus amongst members on the RIF Consultants Team Report proposed amalgamation of FFA, SPREP, SOPAC SPBEA and SPC.

- A small group remained undecided for various reasons sighting the need for more time and information.
- A second group indicated they did not support the recommendations. This group continued to express a position of doubt concerning benefits relative to risks involved in restructuring an established technical advisory system that enjoys regional and international support. Particular concern was about the future effectiveness of FFA and SPREP whose respective Council meetings had met during the RIF consultancy period. This group felt the advice to Leaders should be the aim of establishing better coordinated, more effective services could be pursued over time, by less radical means.
- A third group was in favour of amalgamation, emphasising feasibility, benefits, and the adaptive values of change.

The letter concluded by noting Leaders may have similar difficulties and may wish to consider alternative options for institutional reform.

SOPAC Council was not able to meet immediately prior to the 2007 Forum. However, it is important to recall that SOPAC Council did discuss the 2006 RIF report by Tavola et al, when it met last in Honiara, in September 2006, before the 2006 Forum.

### **SOPAC Council, September 2006**

SOPAC Council was the first governing body to consider the report by Tavola et al. The Council, following consideration of the report which was presented to the Pacific Plan Action Committee immediately prior to the 35<sup>th</sup> SOPAC Governing Council session, decided to write to the Chair of FOC pointing out that there was no consensus on the issues in Council, and also some delegates stated they had not been briefed. However, after a lengthy discussion several issues began to emerge. It was clear to the Chair of Council that on the whole, these issues reflected important concerns in regard to the implications to members on the future delivery of the excellent scientific and technical work programme that SOPAC currently provides.

Those issues of concern to some members of Council, and articulated in the Chair's letter to the Chair of FOC, included the following:

- The lack of clarity and assurance that improved delivery at national level of SOPAC's work programme and services would eventuate from implementing the report recommendations.
- The lack of clarity surrounding the governance, establishment and operation arrangements of the proposed new single technical organisation of which SOPAC would become a part, this includes legal and constitutional issues relating to SOPAC.
- The implication on SOPAC with regard to the potential risk of losing the progress made over the past three decades.
- SOPAC is nearing completion of a review and re-direction of SOPAC and its work programme that has taken 5-6 years, and the date for implementation of the report recommendations of 1st January 2009 was considered by some Council members as overly ambitious, and should remain very flexible,.
- The report does not address the implications for changes in membership in regard to enhancing work programme delivery and being cost effective.

Finally, SOPAC Council members were of the view that it was their responsibility to continue normal activities of SOPAC until directed otherwise by the Leaders.

### **SOPAC Council Action Required to respond to the Leaders 2007 Communiqué**

Clearly, the recent Leaders Communiqué does little to reassure those Council members that expressed concerns at the 2006 meeting in regard to the state of the RIF review process. By enlarge the same concerns prevail in regard to the recent Leaders Communiqué.

Nonetheless, in order to address Para 19(b) clearly there are significant task(s) to be carried out. Equally clear is the fact that there are significant implications for SOPAC, through the intent of, "the need to rationalise its functions" and with the view to "absorbing those functions" into other CROP organisations. It is therefore appropriate that Council, as the body vested by its members with the responsibility for the Commission take the initiative to carry out the task(s) required in order to respond to the Leaders instruction.

This circumstance is made particularly critical as at no stage during the RIF review process this year, including the two meetings of the RIF Taskforce held in June and September 2007, was this impact scenario on SOPAC considered as one of the possible RIF options. Furthermore, at no stage was this raised with the SOPAC Director in the few discussions had with the RIF Manager, Ms Lourdes Pangellinan. Furthermore, very few SOPAC national representatives have been consulted by the RIF Review Team since it commenced its work in early 2007.

As a way forward, it is clear that Council will need to establish a mechanism which will enable the determination of what the criteria are for this rationalisation, as well as the proposed process and timeframe for the absorption of those rationalised functions into SPC and SPREP. Furthermore, Council will have to address the fate of those SOPAC work programme functions that are not to be "absorbed". A mechanism will need to be determined to ensure full consultation with key stakeholders, especially SPC and SPREP governing bodies and all their members, as they differ from SOPACs members, and their Secretariats. Given the differences in membership between the organisations, and the timing of governing body meetings a suggested process to adopt would be as follows.

- "Business as usual" will prevail whilst Council carries out its task(s). This is particularly important to ensure continuity in programme delivery to members, and continuity of discussions with funding partners.

- “Nothing is agreed, until everything is agreed”. This pre-supposes that some rationalisation and absorption is to take place. Once full agreement is reached, at this point implementation can commence.

As for a suggested timeframe, the next 3 years is realistic for full consultations and consensus decisions to eventuate. It is key for SOPAC Council to complete its initial phase of work as a Committee of the Council as a Whole by mid-2008 and considered by Council in Special Session before it is considered by the Forum and other relevant stakeholders including the SPC and SPREP Governing bodies in late 2008. Further action would then follow with a follow-up progress report in mid-2009.

As an immediate step Council may wish to consider writing to the Forum Chair advising of the outcomes of their consideration of the issue, and at the same drawing attention to their position following the 2006 Council meeting.

### **The Rationalisation Process: Principles**

Responding to and implementing the Forum Leaders decision constructively and positively involves the recognition of and adhering to, at the least four objects or principles. These are:

- (i) improving quality of service
- (ii) improving effectiveness of delivery
- (iii) more effective management of limited resources.
- (iv) good governance

These principles are critical to the whole rationalisation process and essential for a successful and appropriate rationalisation exercise.

Perhaps the least recognised of these principles in the rationalisation process is good governance especially manifested in transparency and accountability. In the suggested process for the way forward SOPAC Council is fully cognisant of one of the four Pillars in the Pacific Plan – Governance.

The other three principles could be said to be part of the other three Pillars: Economic Growth, Sustainable Development and Security.

The good governance principle is recognised by all Pacific island countries and donor partners as central e.g. Forum Leaders Auckland Declaration and The Pacific Plan and a phenomena that cannot and or should not be forgotten even in the interest of an organisational or political goal. Just as the SOPAC Governing Council must take heed of the Forum Leaders decision, so should the Forum Leaders recognise that there is a SOPAC Governing Council with professional expertise and legal responsibility to exercise sole authority on SOPAC matters. In pursuit of its positive and constructive response to the Forum Leaders decision the SOPAC Secretariat must follow procedure and seek SOPAC Council’s approval. Moreover in implementing the Leaders decision the process must be transparent and actions accountable.

The way forward process suggested in this paper is based on all the four principles listed above. Above all it is based on the premise that even if principles (i), (ii) and (iii) are achieved, the implementation process will not be credible if principle (iv) is not one of the parameters of the rationalisation process.

## **A Mechanism for Moving Forward in 2008**

A consultative process be established between SOPAC, SPC and SPREP and the final report mutually agreed upon by the three organisations be submitted for consideration by the Forum in 2010 for final agreement and implementation to begin.

A progress report to be submitted to the three governing councils and the Forum in 2008, and a draft final report in 2009.

While the consultative process is ongoing, SOPAC, SPC and SPREP meet and agree on new regional projects to demonstrate complementarity, a higher quality of work, and more effective delivery through cooperation and sharing of resources. The timeframe for this is early 2008 as a starting point especially in view of the SIS Leaders Summit decision.

Whilst Council has options as to how to carry out its work, previous experience would urge that Council agree to oversee this work itself, at least in the interim as a “Committee of the Council as a Whole” supported by the Director and a small team. The Committee’s work will need a TOR.

Council will recall that this approach was adopted and effective on two previous occasions. In 1996-97 when Council at its 25<sup>th</sup> Session agreed to examine the future role and direction of SOPAC (paras 46-60 in the Proceedings of the 25<sup>th</sup> Session, together with Appendix 9 Resolutions of the Committee of the Council as a Whole). To effect this an open-ended committee of Suva-based members was established with a TOR, and was supported by the Director and a Facilitator/Consultant.

In 1999, the CEOs of SOPAC and SPC raised the issue of integration of the two organisations. On this occasion Council considered this issue as a “Committee of the Whole” supported by the Director and a Consultant’s Report for which there was an agreed TOR. The TOR indicated that the objective of the consultancy was to examine and analyse the options for integration of the two regional organisations, SPC and SOPAC highlighting the advantages and disadvantages. The TOR also indicated the key areas of focus as follows.

- Examine the costs and benefits of such a merger as it affects the two administrations, the technical programs, the memberships, and the external supporting agencies, identifying opportunities for savings.
- Address the key political issues that may support or be an impediment to such an integration process.
- Review the constitutional and/or legal instruments of the two organisations, advising on solutions to difficulties.
- Propose possible organisational models for the new single body taking into account realities such as the wider range of technical programs, the possible rationalisation of certain common support services and the geographic location of the two organisations and the membership difference.
- Propose a realistic timing, schedule or phasing for integration that would take into account practical, legal, contractual obligations, and or any other problems that might require prior resolution.

Of particular relevance to this present circumstance is the outcome of this Council deliberation in 2001. A consultant’s report examined a number of options for integration but was mindful of the strong support among stakeholders for maintaining the integrity of SOPAC’s work programmes, and recommended if integration was to proceed SOPAC become a fourth division within SPC. It was further stressed, *“that at the technical programme level there was little merit in any drastic restructuring at this stage”*.

A lengthy discussion took place at both the 1999 and 2000 SOPAC Council Meetings. At its 2001 meeting, Council considered 3 options; (i) to proceed with a merger, (ii) to reject the proposal to merge, (iii) to direct the Secretariat to continue to explore and implement mechanisms other than integration that may offer similar synergies of close cooperation and coordination with a view to re-examining the integration concept at an appropriate later stage. Council endorsed the latter (para 417 of the Proceedings of the 30<sup>th</sup> Session).

### **The “SOPAC Brand”, Funding Base and Funding Security**

The increase of responsibilities of SOPAC through additional project areas over the last 15 years has been the result mostly of Forum decisions. In essence at the time that these Forum decisions were made, none of the major regional organisations wanted these new projects and they were “dumped” on SOPAC in spite of resistance by the SOPAC Governing Council (eg it took three years between decision by the Forum to convince SOPAC to take in disaster management). Water and energy were also incorporated under similar circumstances. An in-depth analysis of how SOPAC’s present responsibilities grew shows that SOPAC did not “go out and advocate” for these new responsibilities as claimed by many experts/consultants.

The core of SOPAC’s operation is applied science and technology and this has been and will continue to be its strength. It is the foundation of its contribution to supporting sustainable development through its mandate. Indeed the fact that its activities are housed in one complex allows for integrated approaches between different, mutually reinforcing disciplines in the planning, action and delivery of projects.

The “SOPAC Brand” is well recognised nationally, regionally and internationally. It is succinctly articulated in the Commission’s vision to become a centre of expertise that supports its Pacific Island Communities in developing natural resources, principally non-living resources, in a sustainable manner and strengthening resilience through integrated solutions in Ocean and Islands management, Community Lifelines development and Community Risk management (Foreword to the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan)

The efficacy of SOPAC as a repository of essential technical expertise and a key development partner in addressing key regional development priorities is crucial. By promoting the development of natural resources, building the resilience of communities and improving their access to basic necessities, safe health, information and appropriate technologies, SOPAC contributes to sustainable development and reduction of poverty in the region. Its recurring focal theme is ‘community’ or ‘people’ and hence the underlying goal is not merely ‘sustainable development’ but equally to ensure ‘worthwhile lives’, for Pacific people, as articulated in the Leaders Vision of the Pacific Plan.

This “SOPAC Brand” was well articulated in 1997 by Professor Keith Crook, the then Chair of SOPAC’s Science Technology and Resources Network (STAR), when he reported to Council that: *‘Geoscience’ is not just about geology (e.g. minerals) and geophysics (e.g. earthquakes). Rather it is about the broad sweep of sciences that study the earth. It includes, as well, physical oceanography, meteorology, marine biology and ecology, and aspects of earth-related social sciences such as urban geography.*

The funding security and breadth of the work programme of SOPAC was questioned, by some, at the time of the 1996-7 review and the 2000 SOPAC-SPC integration study.

A glance at the Commission’s annual work programme and budget and financial reports for the past 5 years indicates three important conclusions in regard to the funding base and funding security.

- The funding being provided to SOPAC has risen from FJD\$7.4m in 2000, to \$30.0m for 2008.
- For the past three years and for 2008, 98% of this funding has been secured.
- The significant increase in funding provided to SOPAC is “new” money sourced from non-traditional partners, or non-traditional sources from existing partners.

This clearly demonstrates that the “SOPAC Brand” has successfully tapped into, and secured, new financial resources to support its members.

It is inevitable that the current circumstances will put the “SOPAC Brand” at risk, together with placing substantive stress on the Secretariat and its workforce in respect of sustained service delivery.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion Council:

(i) Noted that the core business of SOPAC is excellence in applied scientific and technical information and knowledge of earth systems, and demonstrating how this knowledge contributes to sustainable development for its island members.

(ii) Noted that SOPAC has grown substantially over the past 35 years in many aspects into a well-established, and well respected regional organisation serving its Pacific Island members in developing natural resources, principally non-living resources, in a sustainable manner and strengthening resilience through integrated solutions in its three programme areas: Ocean and Islands management, Community Lifelines development and Community Risk management.

(iii) Recognised that partners currently identify with SOPAC to the extent that the Commission now enjoys a substantial, secure annual budget which includes the attraction of non-traditional “new” money to support service delivery to its members.

(iv) Recognised further that throughout its existence the Commission has regularly been “reviewed” in regard to its future, its role, and its direction, to which it has responded positively and emerged with improved and strengthened of services to its members.

(v) Noted further that whilst the 2007 Leaders Communique does not call for a review of SOPAC, it in fact goes further to suggest radical changes to SOPAC, but is not supported by any evidence of due diligence and consideration by members during the RIF process.

(vi) Acknowledged with concern that circumstances such as this increase demands on the Secretariat, and cause stress on the staff, that will impact current levels of service delivery.

(vii) Nonetheless, is fully cognisant of the need to maintain the momentum established by the Leaders decision, in order to ensure the continuity in both the quality and effective delivery of service in meeting the needs of the people.

(viii) Recognised the critical need to adhere to at least the four principles of: improving quality of service; improving effectiveness of delivery; more effective management of limited resources; and good governance; not only for a successful and appropriate rationalisation outcome as well as to maintain and re-enforce the internationally recognised positive high profile image of our Leaders, and of the SOPAC Governing Council.

Council therefore:

**Agreed** to accept the challenge offered by the 2007 Leaders Communiqué which states “the need to rationalise the functions of SOPAC with the work programmes of SPC and SPREP, with the view to absorbing those functions of SOPAC into SPC and SPREP”.

**Recommends** the following course of action as a way forward in responding to the Leaders decision.

(i) A consultative process be established between SOPAC, SPC and SPREP and the final report mutually agreed upon by the three organisations be submitted for consideration by the Forum in 2010 for final agreement and implementation to begin.

(ii) During the consultative process some of the issues to be considered will include:

- Proposing possible options for rationalisation and possible organisational models for the new arrangements taking into account realities such as the wider range of technical programmes, the possible rationalisation of certain common support services, the geographic location, and the membership differences.
- Examining the costs and benefits of the Leaders decision, the technical programmes, the memberships, and the external supporting agencies, identifying opportunities for improved service delivery.
- Proposing a realistic timing for implementation that would need to be taken into account including practical, legal, contractual obligations, and or any other problems that might require prior resolution as a result of absorption.

(iii) A progress report be submitted to the three governing councils and the Forum in 2008, and a draft final report in 2009.

(iv) While the consultative process is ongoing, SOPAC, SPC and SPREP design and develop from concept all new regional projects to demonstrate complementarity, a higher quality of work, and more effective delivery through cooperation and sharing of resources. The timeframe for this is early 2008 as a starting point especially in view of the SIS Summit decision.

(v) To respond to the Leaders decision, Council **agreed** that “a Committee of the SOPAC Council as a Whole”, supported by the Director and a small team be established and adequately resourced.

(vi) SPC and SPREP governing bodies be invited to fully engage in the consultative process.

**Agreed** to emphasise to all stakeholders, especially members, donor partners, and Secretariat staff, that in the interim the Commission would continue with its current work and efforts to secure resources for sustained service delivery under the direction and guidance of the Council.

**Agreed** to immediately respond by writing to the Forum Chair, and Chairs of SPC and SPREP governing bodies, advising of the outcomes of its consideration of the issue at the 2007 Council Meeting.