

Opening Address by Chair of 4th SCW Meeting

Colleagues – a very good morning to you all and thank you for your attendance at this the 4th SOPAC Council Committee-of-the-Whole meeting for 2008.

Committee members will recall that at our 3rd meeting in mid-July we agreed that there be a 4th meeting either in August or September to consider any decisions and progress that may have been taken in advance of our Council meeting.

This will be the last Committee meeting before we meet in Council in Funafuti where we will deliberate on the progress that this Committee has made in respect of its decision taken to accept the challenge and respond positively to Paragraph 19(b) of the 2007 Forum Communiqué.

Tuvalu has again assumed the Chair of this Committee meeting due to commitments that have prevented the SOPAC Chair who also (as you know) has chaired this Committee, from being with us today. The Honourable Tuita sends his best wishes to the meeting and trusts that it will be a constructive one as we move toward the 37th Annual Session of the SOPAC Governing Council. He assures us that he will be attending the 37th SOPAC Annual Session to hand the Chair over to my Government - Tuvalu and to report to Council on the work of this Committee in respect of the Regional Institutional Framework as it relates to SOPAC and particularly on progress against the Council decision made last November.

Colleagues, I will do my utmost to Chair this meeting in such a way that we can give as much time as is needed for our deliberations here today, and at the same time ensure that we retain focus and are able to conclude our discussions expeditiously.

Since SOPAC Council met in Tonga in November of last year the Committee has worked diligently and must be congratulated for its achievements of some significant milestones. These have been well articulated in the progress report to the Forum that we agreed to at our last meeting and which our Chair shared, under a covering letter, with the Forum Chair, prior to the Forum Leaders meeting held in Niue just last month.

I would like to suggest and commend to you that the progress report to the Forum should provide the core of our reporting to SOPAC Council for its consideration on this matter in Funafuti next month. As you will recall our progress report includes “a roadmap for a way forward, with possible timelines” which I would offer resonates with the timelines of paragraph 20 (c) of the 2008 Forum Communiqué and further elaboration in the decision of SPREP at their recent meeting convened in the FSM last week.

This meeting will need to consider those decisions and discuss what implications these may have on our work and the work of Council over the course of the months ahead and leading up to the next Forum meeting as SPREP, SPC and SOPAC work toward responding to the Forum Communiqués as well as the decisions on the RIF that have been made by each of their Governing bodies. As there will not be another meeting of this Committee before our Council meeting, the decision of the SPC's CRGA will need to be circulated as a supplementary paper to the relevant agenda item during our Council meeting.

There is also the draft legal assessment that will need to be considered during Council, with a view to finalising that assessment which primarily focuses on the legal implications of Article 16 of the SOPAC Agreement that allows for the dissolution or suspension of the Commission.

An important task for us for this meeting is to decide on the nature of our report and its recommendations, for a way forward, to Council, which is an obligation under our Terms of Reference. This will go some way toward informing Council's deliberations on the rationalisation of SOPAC's services and functions into SPREP and SPC and to ensure that our Council is able to progress in such a way that SOPAC continues to build upon its positive response to the 2007 and now 2008 Forum Communiqués.

We have some work to do today and I wish our discussions well. Thank you.