



SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

**Ministry Of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster
Management & Meteorology**

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE,
DISASTER MANAGEMENT & METEOROLOGY, HON. SAMUEL MANETOALI (MP)**

NATIONAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM

Monday, 2nd OCTOBER 2017,

HERITAGE PARK HOTEL. HONIARA.

*Honourable Premiers of Malaita and Choiseul Provinces and delegations,
Representatives of Non-Government Organisation Community, Civil Society,
Community-based Organisations,
Community Leaders and Field Managers,
Representatives of the Research Community and Practitioners,
Representatives of the Private Sector,
Government Officials (both at National and Provincial Levels), and
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good Morning!

It is indeed a great honour for me to be part of this important occasion, this morning.

First, allow me to acknowledge your presence with us and welcome you all, noting that most of you have travelled from afar from your families and communities to attend the series of meetings planned for the week.

I am aware that this week long event is being convened under the theme: **“Connecting People with Nature – A Decade of Learning”**. Our country as you all know and understand consists of islands dispersed and connected by the vast ocean. We have inherent geophysical, climatic and economic vulnerabilities because of our location and place in the global economy. Yet we must also acknowledge that we are endowed with natural resources based on **ecosystems** on land and in the sea.

Our economy is based on the extraction and export of a few natural resources. Our livelihood, cultures and customs are steeped and based on nature. In other words, “we are null and void without nature”. However, if one is to characterise how we have utilised our natural resources since being founded as a country, it is very easy for descriptions such as “unsustainable utilisation and consumption” and “wanton disregard for the natural environment” to be used as descriptors of our conduct as a people and country. Consequently, we need to strengthen, and in some cases repair our connection to nature.

Humans are an integral part of nature. It is also the principal instigator of change to natural systems mainly because of our ability to modify the carrying capacity and tolerance range of nature, more so to its detriment. This is possible because of the growing technological sophistication and innovations at our disposal and our enhanced knowledge and skills to manipulate them, to our advantage and uncaring approach to natural resource extraction where profit is pursued with little or no regard at all to the natural environment and its social connections and impacts. While human civilisation can be blamed for the shift from **‘man and woman with nature’ to ‘man and woman against nature’** one must not forget that there is still opportunity for the growth in the human footprint or its destructive nature to be kept in check.

Connecting people with nature, makes perfect sense in our efforts and endeavours to ensure we better appreciate our role as the custodians of our environment. Intergenerational equity as implied requires strong stewardship in managing our natural resources. There are imbalanced biases nowadays towards socio-economic systems at the expense of environmental sustainability. This was rarely encountered in the past. One reason for maintaining such strong resilient ecosystems has been how traditional

knowledge was used in resource management practices by humans. Of course, lack of population pressure on the environmental resources has had considerable influence, as well. Despite lack of scientific information about the complexity of ecological processes and lack of profound knowledge of modern conservation management approaches people still succeeded in maximising conservation and economic objectives.

I would like to now focus on the last part of the theme “***A Decade of Learning***”. We have made significant strides albeit challenges faced in nature conservation and protection, and to some extent as well in terms of nature restoration. In this connection, I thank all stakeholders here for your efforts. Nevertheless, we remain challenged by biophysical limitations such as limited natural resources and growing population, unsustainable rates of extraction of natural resources, and the perpetuation of a false dichotomy between economic development and nature conservation and protection. It is from the above contexts that we have to learn from both good and bad practices. We have to ask questions, discuss and debate our practices and what we have learnt, and how we have learnt in the past decade. As we all know, learning is indispensable to any human enterprise or undertaking, but learning without putting into practice the lessons learnt is the route to NATO – “No Action, Talking Only”.

Let me now address some of our national government policy stipulations connected with nature conservation and protection. Sustainable utilisation and conservation of natural resources, protection of the environment and combating the adverse effects of climate change are important policy objectives of the present DCC Government. The need for sustainable natural resource consumption and build a resilient and environmentally sustainable development is further emphasised in the National Development Strategy 2016 – 2035. For these policy objectives and strategy to be achieved, as required by the Government, the ideal situation in such endeavours would be to have access to scientific information on the country’s natural resources including the biotic (biodiversity) and abiotic (nonliving) component of the environment. In particular, without important information on the geographical distribution, population status and population trends of our biodiversity and the rate at which they are removed, determining what is sustainable

to conserve and manage our resources is not guaranteed. Nonetheless, this does not affect their harvesting and use or the status quo.

There were two attempts in the past to take stock of and provide new information about the Solomon Islands' environment and natural resources. This is in the form of the State of the Environment Report, an important requirement in the Environment Act 1998. The first ever report was published in 1993 while the second was published in 2008. The State of the Environment Report is required to be produced after every three years of which my Ministry's goal is to deliver and produce consistent reporting as such. The assessments conducted as part of these two reports have made specific revelations about the country's information management systems and research capacity: (i) the reports were produced using mostly secondary data sources and grey literature (NGOs, donor agencies and academic institutions), (ii) lack of relevant information has been a significant gap, and (iii) the credibility of most information was an issue. As you would now realize, while information may be available and sitting somewhere, gaining access to them and ascertaining their credibility for decision-making remain major challenges.

Contrary to the popular view so often associated with Island countries, Solomon Islands is among the Hotspots of Biodiversity in the Pacific region because of its rich marine and terrestrial biodiversity. This can be illustrated at the species level with the following:

- Approximately eighty (80) species of reptiles are known in the country, with over one third endemic and five (5) identified as threatened species.
- At least fifty one (51) native mammal species inhabit the archipelago, with nearly twenty (20) being endemic and twenty (20) of which identified as threatened.
- Of the one hundred sixty three (163) species of land birds that breed in the Solomon Islands, seventy two (72) are found nowhere else in the world.
- At least one hundred thirty (130) species of butterflies described for the country, thirty four (34) of which is endemic.
- Even now, recent findings are adding new numbers to the counts of plants and animals in Solomon Islands and yet most remain undiscovered too.

Unfortunately, most of them are also threatened which could be even worsened due to their high degree of endemism. Let me take the opportunity to encourage and invite participants with relevant information to share your experiences and knowledge of the country's biodiversity, be it field managers, researchers, community leaders or practitioners. It is only through collaboration, partnership and information exchange that we can use our resources wisely and better protect our environment.

As alluded to earlier, my Ministry through the Environment and Conservation Division will soon be working on our next State of the Environment Report. As important stakeholders we very much anticipate your valuable contributions towards this project. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) is the equivalent of the State of the Environment Report in the country. It has, however, a more focused scope as it only covers efforts to synthesize available information on the status of the country's biodiversity. This symposium, let me stress, has its roots in the Environment Act 1998, Wildlife Protection and Management (Amendment) Act 2017 and Protected Areas Act 2010. These legislative frameworks are all concerned with protecting and conserving the country's environmental resources including its biodiversity. The tools that are used to promote environmental sustainability are the environmental impact assessment process, protected areas systems, international wildlife trade control and biodiversity research.

I hope the discussions you will have within the next few days will contribute immensely to the current knowledge we already have about environment and natural resources. Such informal information exchanges is not enough though. As practitioners and field managers it is incumbent on us to use these information and knowledge in our respective work places. Further, we have to establish a repository for this information, where they are readily available and can be easily accessed. As a humble reminder, the Director of Environment and Conservation has power under section 26 of the Protected Areas Act 2010 to direct your activities, as deemed appropriate. Again, for us to be good custodians and live within the carrying capacity of nature, we need relevant information, albeit in a form that can easily be translated, to be shared amongst us.

It is my hope that you all will find this Symposium a practical platform to **re-think, reflect, refocus and re-discuss ways** forward to ensuring that we remain champions for a sustainable, resilient future for our provinces, our villages, our families and our children's future. Continue to raise the Nature's gift to all of us as I too, **am WITH NATURE!**

I wish you all fruitful discussions and thank you for your attention.