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PALM10 Special

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Palau's Rock Islands Southern Lagoon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. GETTY IMAGES

Striding forward together

FUMIO KISHIDA
PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN

Japan and Pacific island countries and regions, connected by the Pacific Ocean and *kizuna* (bonds), have been and will continue to be mutually indispensable partners.

The circle of friendship between Japan and the Pacific islands has been expanded through exchanges in various areas, including in sports and at the local government level. Tuna and bonito caught in the waters around Pacific island nations have long enriched Japanese people's food culture. Over the years, Japan and Pacific island countries and regions have worked hand in hand to tackle common challenges such as climate change and disaster management and prevention. Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers have dedicated themselves to the development of each country alongside local communities, sometimes even before the establishment of diplomatic relations. I have personally heard from Pacific island leaders heart-warming stories about their contributions, of which I am very proud.

It was back in the 20th century when the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting was initiated. I have been involved in the PALM process for over a decade now. At the second Ministerial Interim Meeting in 2013, which I attended as foreign minister, I stressed that Japan and Pacific island countries were steadily deepening dialogue and cooperation and highlighted the importance of our mutual cooperation.



This is the spirit that we have proudly cultivated and carried on to this day.

It has been 27 years since the first PALM, and 2050 — the target year for the "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent" endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum leaders — will come in 27 years, counting this year. On the basis of *kizuna*, as well as shared values and principles backed by the nearly 30-year history of the PALM process, we will pass on our strong relationship of trust and friendship to the next 30 years as we adapt to changing circumstances.

Japan will continue to stride forward together with Pacific island countries and regions toward 2050.

Regional cooperation vital to maintain international order

Pacific must remain stable and secure to ensure access to important trade routes and partners

SAYURI DAIMON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting will kick off July 16 in Tokyo to discuss cooperation in dealing with regional issues ranging from climate change-related development assistance to collaboration on human resources to maintaining security in the region.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the triennial meeting online in 2021, this is the first face-to-face PALM meeting to be held in six years.

"Japan has been regularly holding it for more than 25 years, inviting all the heads of state of this region," said Takehiro Kurosaki, an associate professor at Tokai University who specializes in international relations among Pacific island countries, noting that there is no such meeting consistently hosted by one country alone. "In that sense, it is a unique and highly regarded tool of Japanese diplomacy."

This year's three-day summit comes as some of the world's major economies, including the U.S. and China, seek more engagement with the Pacific islands amid the region's growing geopolitical importance.

Kurosaki stressed that the leaders' meeting is a significant opportunity for Japan to ramp up its presence in the resource-rich region while maintaining its unique position as an independent partner of it.

Key trade partner

Japan hosted the first PALM in 1997, hoping to strengthen its ties with Pacific island countries.

The members include 14 countries — the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Other participants include Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, according to the Foreign Ministry.

The region has been an extremely



important trade partner for Japan, especially when it comes to natural resources.

"For example, Papua New Guinea has been exporting liquefied natural gas since 2014, and half of the natural gas exported from Papua New Guinea comes to Japan," Kurosaki said, adding that 5% of Japan's overall LNG imports come from Papua New Guinea. "When you consider the places where natural gas is found, such as Russia or the Middle East, it is very important to secure a stable supply of natural resources."

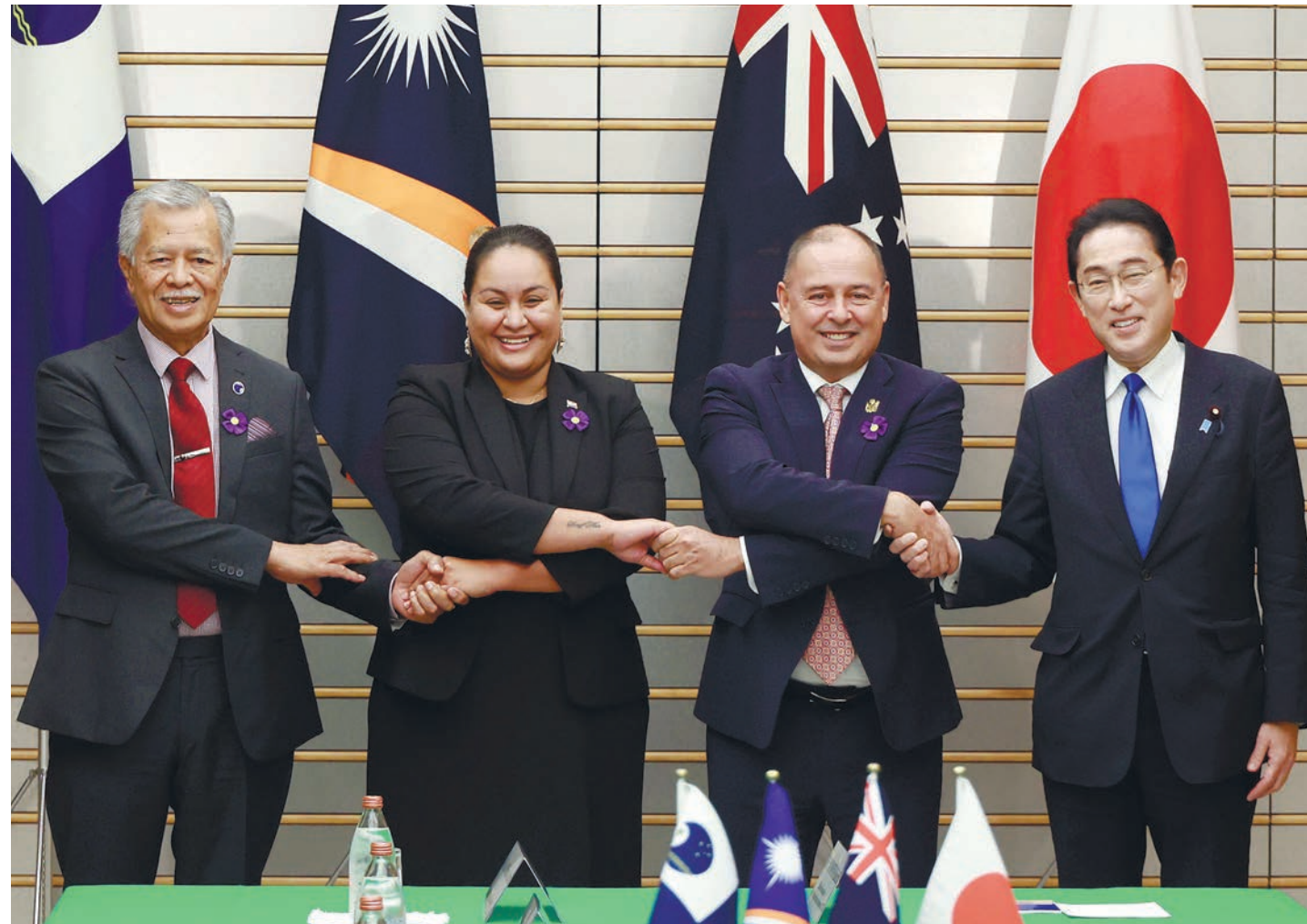
Kurosaki also pointed out that Japan imports significant quantities of marine products from the South Pacific, such as bonito and tuna, and that the region serves as an important trading route for Japan because most of the goods it imports from Australia, Europe and other regions pass through this area.

"Without a stable security situation in this region, it would be impossible for Japan to trade with the rest of the world, so it is an extremely important area," he said.

China's growing influence

Apart from PALM, the region has a leading political organization called the Pacific Islands Forum (formerly known as the South Pacific Forum), which was founded in 1971 under the initiative of New Zealand. They meet regularly every year to discuss common issues of concern in the region.

Since Japan is not a member of the PIF, it hoped to create its own relationship with the islands, according to Izumi Kobayashi, president of the Japan Pacific Islands Association and a professor at Osaka Gakuin University.



From left: Then-Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Henry Puna, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Marshall Islands Kitlang Kabua and Prime Minister of the Cook Islands Mark Brown pose with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Feb. 7, 2023, in Tokyo. JJI

Kobayashi said at a recent news briefing that China's growing interest in the Pacific region has become more visible in the past two decades. Shortly before the fourth PALM in May 2006, China invited six Pacific island countries to hold a diplomatic relations summit, offering a commitment to provide ¥40 billion (\$249 million) in aid over three years, he said.

Taiwan factor

Since then, China has flexed its diplomatic muscles to reach out to the Pacific islands and thus target Taiwan with its growing influence. In recent years, China has pressured island nations with diplomatic ties with Taiwan to abandon their recognition of Taiwan as an independent state, with Kiribati and the Solomon Islands doing so in 2019. Most recently, Nauru also cut ties

with Taipei after Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, was elected in January.

China also concluded a security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022.

Currently, only three of the 14 Pacific island nations maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but experts say those countries will not easily drift toward China as Taiwan works very closely with the United States. These small nations are also aware of the importance of maintaining "balanced diplomacy" to avoid getting involved in conflicts between major powers.

Just like the assistance provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Taiwan provides these nations with important assistance in nutrition, education, agriculture, medical care and disease control, according to Hideyuki Shiozawa, senior program officer of the Pacific Island

Nations Program Team at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

"It is appreciated by the people because they continue to provide the same assistance in the same areas for a long time," he said.

On the contrary, Shiozawa pointed out that China's strength is its ability to swiftly complete huge infrastructure projects.

A sports stadium it erected in the Solomon Islands before the Pacific Games late last year is a good example. The continental multisport event for countries and territories in Oceania is held every four years, like the Olympics.

U.S. approach

Alarmed by China's actions, other major economies, such as France and Indonesia, have initiated similar meetings with the leaders of island countries. In 2022

and 2023, the U.S. invited leaders from the South Pacific to Washington, pledging nearly \$800 million in economic aid at the second summit last year.

"In the early days, creating a venue for the heads of state to get together and have direct dialogues in Japan was important. But as more and more countries started hosting similar leaders' summits, it became apparent that PALM needed to do more," Shiozawa said.

Shiozawa said Japan should learn from the U.S. approach and break out of the old way of doing things.

"In the U.S., people from various government agencies, who are from all levels and fields, hold individual meetings with heads of state and government arrive. They discuss what kind of things they are going to do on a practical basis. That's what the Pacific island nations originally wanted to do," he said.

"They want to discuss the real issues with each other and solve them at the summit."

In that sense, the 10th PALM is about taking the summit to the next stage, said Tokai University's Kurosaki.

Pointing out the fact that the island countries are not happy to be forced to join one camp or the other, he said Japan should set aside political agendas and put forward its support as an equal partner in building the region's future.

"I hope Japan will be able to present its message in a way that takes PALM to the next stage," he said.

Other experts pointed out that Japan remains in a different position than other donor countries and former colonial powers.

"Japan is a partner that has built its relationship for decades and has built connections with people in the region. I think it is important to further deepen such relationships and that will give Japan a uniqueness that is a little different from the U.S., Australia, and other countries," Kurosaki said.

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Profiles

Countries and regions participating in the Pacific Island Leaders Meeting



Republic of Kiribati

Land area: 810 sq. km
EEZ: 3,441,810 sq. km
Population: 124,742
Capital: Tarawa
GDP: \$223 million
Industries: fishing, handicrafts



Reef around Fanning Island, Kiribati

Cook Islands

Land area: 240 sq. km
EEZ: 1,830,000 sq. km
Population: 15,470
Capital: Avarua
GDP: \$336 million
Industries: fishing, fruit processing, tourism, clothing, handicrafts



Rarotonga Beach, Cook Islands

Republic of Fiji

Land area: 18,270 sq. km
EEZ: 1,282,980 sq. km
Population: 904,590
Capital: Suva
GDP: \$4.98 billion
Industries: tourism, sugar processing, clothing, copra, gold, silver, lumber



Sawa-i-Lau Caves on the Yasawa Islands, Fiji

Republic of the Marshall Islands

Land area: 180 sq. km
EEZ: 1,990,530 sq. km
Population: 54,366
Capital: Majuro
GDP: \$258 million
Industries: copra, tuna processing, tourism, craft items (from seashells, wood, and pearls)



Majuro, capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Niue

Land area: 260 sq. km
EEZ: 450,000 sq. km
Population: 1,510
Capital: Alofi
GDP: 38 million (NZ\$)
Industries: handicrafts, food processing



A coconut crab crosses a road in Niue.

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

Land area: 452,860 sq. km
EEZ: 2,402,290 sq. km
Population: 9,501,006
Capital: Port Moresby
GDP: \$31.6 billion
Industries: oil and gas; mining; palm oil processing; plywood and wood chip production; copra crushing; construction; tourism; fishing



Sunset on Petats Island, Papua New Guinea

Federated States of Micronesia

Land area: 700 sq. km
EEZ: 2,996,420 sq. km
Population: 106,194
Capital: Palikir
GDP: \$424 million
Industries: tourism, construction; specialized aquaculture, craft items (shells and wood)



Kepirohi Waterfall in Pohnpei, Micronesia

Independent State of Samoa

Land area: 2,780 sq. km
EEZ: 127,950 sq. km
Population: 202,100
Capital: Apia
GDP: \$833 million
Industries: food processing, building materials, auto parts



To-Sua Ocean Trench in Samoa

Solomon Islands

Land area: 27,990 sq. km
EEZ: 1,553,440 sq. km
Population: 761,215
Capital: Honiara
GDP: \$1.6 billion
Industries: fishing (tuna), mining, timber



Choiseul Island, Solomon Islands

Republic of Nauru

Land area: 20 sq. km
EEZ: 308,480 sq. km
Population: 12,017
GDP: \$151 million
Industries: phosphate mining, offshore banking, coconut products



Anibare boat harbor, Nauru

Kingdom of Tonga

Land area: 720 sq. km
EEZ: 659,558 sq. km
Population: 99,026
Capital: Nuku'alofa
GDP: \$469 million
Industries: tourism, construction, fishing



Aerial view of islands in Tonga

Republic of Vanuatu

Land area: 12,190 sq. km
EEZ: 663,251 sq. km
Population: 314,653
Capital: Port Vila
GDP: \$1 billion
Industries: food and fish freezing, wood processing, meat canning



Landscape of a blue river in a jungle in Vanuatu

Republic of Palau

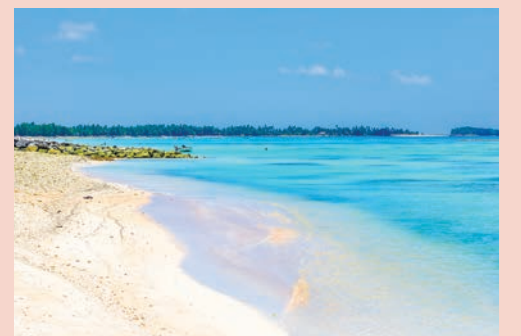
Land area: 460 sq. km
EEZ: 603,978 sq. km
Population: 17,989
Capital: Melekeok
GDP: \$232 million
Industries: tourism, fishing, subsistence agriculture



Rock Islands Southern Lagoon in Palau

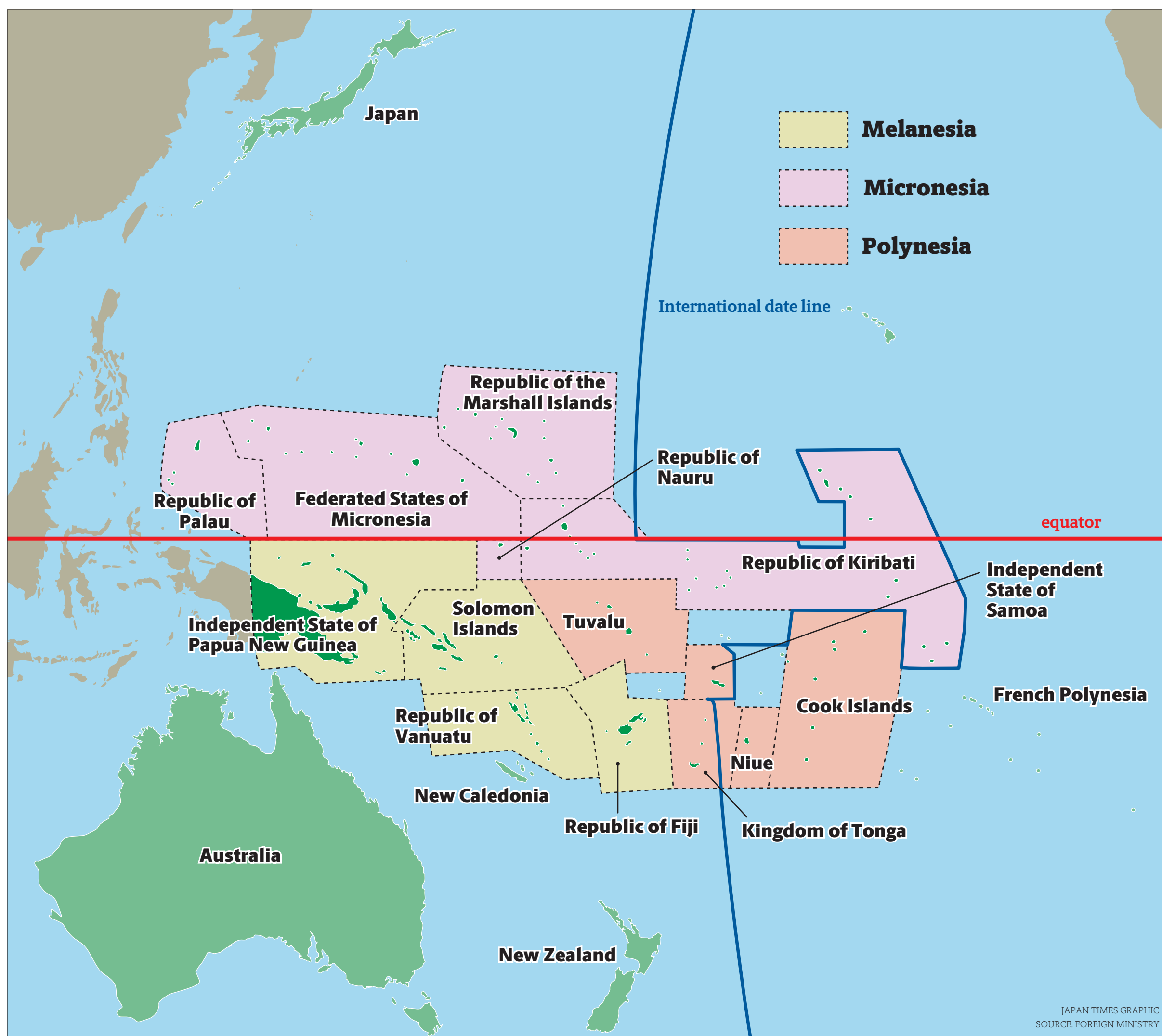
Tuvalu

Land area: 30 sq. km
EEZ: 749,790 sq. km
Population: 10,876
Capital: Funafuti
GDP: \$60 million
Industries: fishing



Beautiful beach on Tuvalu

Profiles



The Napoleon fish is said to be a favorite among divers in Palau.



A sea turtle explores the waters off Okinawa.



A humpback whale cavorts off the coast of Kaikoura, New Zealand.



A manta ray glides over the reefs of the Palau archipelago.



Clownfish swim among sea anemone off Ishigaki Island, Okinawa Prefecture.

Australia

Land area: 7,692,024 sq. km
EEZ: 8.2 million sq. km
Population: 26 million
Capital: Canberra
GDP: \$1.675 trillion
Industries: mining, industrial and transportation equipment, food processing, chemicals, steel



Famous Heart Reef of Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Japan

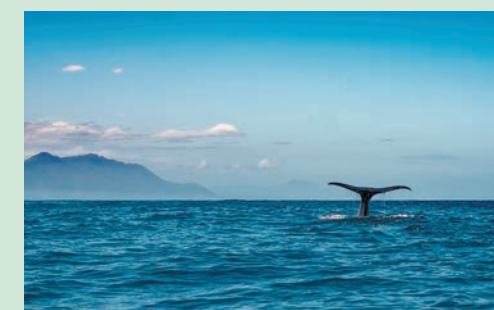
Land area: 378,000 sq. km
EEZ: 4.47 million sq. km
Population: 123 million
GDP: \$4.232 trillion
Industries: motor vehicles, electronic equipment, machine tools, steel and nonferrous metals, ships, chemicals, textiles, processed foods



Ishigaki Island, Okinawa Prefecture

New Zealand

Land area: 270,534 sq. km
EEZ: 4 million sq. km
Population: 5.2 million
Capital: Wellington
GDP: \$247 billion
Industries: agriculture, forestry, fishing, logs and wood articles, manufacturing, mining, construction, financial services, real estate services, tourism



A sperm whale dives off New Zealand with the Kaikoura Ranges in the background.

French Polynesia

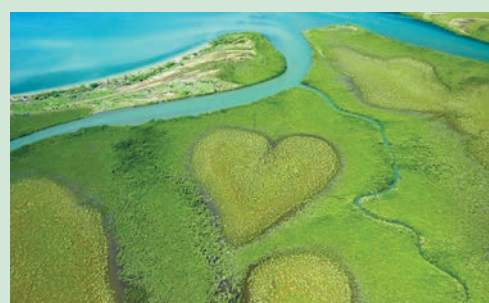
Land area: 3,471 sq. km
EEZ: 4,767,240 sq. km
Population: 281,811
Capital: Papeete (located in Tahiti)
GDP: \$5.8 billion
Industries: tourism, pearls, agricultural processing, handicrafts, phosphates



Water bungalows in Bora Bora, French Polynesia

New Caledonia

Land area: 18,280 sq. km
EEZ: 1,422,540 sq. km
Population: 275,315
Capital: Noumea
GDP: \$ 9.6 billion
Industries: nickel mining and smelting



The Heart of Voh, a natural clearing formed by mangroves, in New Caledonia

NOTES

EEZ: EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE.
 GDP: CALCULATED AT OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES. HOME-CURRENCY-DENOMINATED ANNUAL FIGURE DIVIDED BY AVERAGE U.S. EXCHANGE RATE USED WITH THAT COUNTRY IN THAT YEAR.
 SOURCES: PACIFIC DATA HUB, CIA WORLD FACTBOOK, FOREIGN MINISTRY.
 PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Pacific sustainability

(Sponsored content)

Island nations fight climate change in unity with Japan

Samoa-based training and research center organizing regional response to threats posed by warming

The Pacific islands cover nearly a fifth of the Earth's surface, and Japan and the greater international community depend on these territories, primarily because of their shipping routes and commercial fishing.

These nations are also on the front line of climate change and they need significant support to weather its effects. An island nation itself, Japan has been providing funding, expertise and more for decades to make them more climate-resilient, including by creating and running the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting every three years since 1997 to discuss regional issues and strengthen its ties with these countries.

Mutual interests

As climate change and marine pollution continue to stir concern as global problems, the Pacific island countries have taken on greater prominence. Fiji hosted the 23rd U.N. Climate Change Conference in 2017, for example, and Papua New Guinea hosted the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting.

PALM reinforces their ties in matters like these and much more. At the virtual PALM 9 event in 2021, for example, leaders expressed their commitment to working together on five priority areas for the next three years: COVID-19 response and recovery, sustainable oceans based on the rule of law, climate change and disaster resilience, strengthening the foundation for sustainable and resilient economic development, and people-to-people exchanges and human resource development.

A hub for cooperation

Japan's contributions are often directed through the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Masato Kawanishi, a senior JICA adviser since 2005, has been involved in official development assistance projects addressing climate change in Indonesia, and most recently in the preparation and evaluation stages of two JICA projects, including the new Project for Innovative Solutions for Pacific Climate Change Resilience with the Pacific Climate Change Centre in Apia, Samoa.

"Our cooperation in the region through the PCCC is mainly a grant aid project for the construction of the PCCC and two technical assistance projects," Kawanishi said. "These were developed as a set, with the Japanese government signing an agreement to build the PCCC in 2016."

Officially established in 2019, the PCCC was created to become a center of excellence for brokering knowledge, research, innovation and capacity building and training on climate change, according to Kawanishi.

"Spurred by the Japanese government's actions, New Zealand, Australia and Ireland continue to support the PCCC, which has become a platform for development partner activities in the region," Kawanishi continued.

The manager of the PCCC 'Ofa Ma'asi-Kaisamy explained that her role is to guide the center's strategic direction and operational delivery, leading a staff of seven, joined by two JICA personnel.

"I also take the lead on networking, partnerships and collaboration, ensuring that we engage effectively with our member countries as well as our partners and donors," she added. An international environmental lawyer from the Kingdom of Tonga, Kaisamy also has an academic background in ocean law and policy, as well as extensive experience in law, project management and climate change resilience.



The Pacific Climate Change Centre in Apia is fully powered by the sun, with 20% of the solar panels on its roof funded by Japan. PCCC

The center is hosted at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, a regional organization also based in Apia. Kaisamy guides the PCCC's work in line with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and SPREP's overarching strategic plan, which ties into the vision and work of the center.

The PCCC was founded in 2019 and became operational in 2020. According to Kaisamy, partnership, networking and collaboration are all crucial to ensuring the center effectively delivers on its mandates and key functions.

Through initiatives like capacity building and its knowledge brokerage, the center has improved local resilience to climate change. As an information and training hub on climate change, it offers proven training and creates and runs training courses geared for the Pacific.

"We translate scientific information in the field of climate change into language

'We translate scientific information in the field of climate change into language that allows our decision-makers to make informed policy decisions.'

that allows our decision-makers to make informed policy decisions. We have coordinated regional workshops for our countries in the Pacific and convened national workshops for Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tonga and others. Another core element of the center's work is to promote training and learning by coordinating, supporting and delivering capacity

building and climate change training to our member nations and the public."

Kaisamy said the center's greatest accomplishment to date is the physical building, the PCCC they work in.

"It's a 100% solar-powered building showcasing leadership, attainable ambitions and sustainable building technology in the Pacific. This also demonstrates that through small steps locally, everyone can collectively and collaboratively cut greenhouse gas emissions by a significant amount in our region. This initiative is aligned to the vision of the PCCC as a center of excellence for our Pacific peoples, for climate change information, for science to services and applied research, for capacity building and knowledge brokerage." Japan, she added, was responsible for underwriting 20% of the solar panels for the 100-kilowatt rooftop solar system, while the remaining 80% was funded through the Irish Aid Fund.

Expert advice and counsel

JICA Magazine reports that training is key to addressing climate change. When the PCCC opened its doors in July 2019, JICA launched the Project for Capacity Build-

ing on Climate Resilience in the Pacific to establish a training capability within the PCCC and ensure that practitioners can address climate change issues through such programs.

"That project focused on human resource training centered around three pillars: climate change adaptation, climate change mitigation and access to climate finance," Kawanishi explained.

Through this project — which develops the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt and thrive in a fast-changing world — about 520 people from the region, including personnel from governmental and nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, were trained, with 369 receiving certificates for completion.

According to Kaisamy, Papua New Guinea has adapted concept notes and results from the capacity-building course to strengthen climate resilience and access to safe water in rural areas. The government of Tonga is now using them to formulate a proposal for transforming tourism into climate action initiatives.

The JICA training program also spurred initiatives from other countries.

"After we delivered a training course on health and climate change in 2022 in partnership with the University of Melbourne, they approached us again in 2023 asking whether we were interested in partnering to put together an application for the Australia Awards Fellowship program on climate, health and equity funded by the Australian government. We identified 15 fellows from the Pacific for the program from that cohort that have been trained under the Capacity Building on Climate Resilience in the Pacific program." Their training over six weeks at the University of Melbourne really improved the resilience of Pacific communities, and the Australia Awards Fellowship program served as an example of an effective model for regional capacity building on critical issues of importance for regional stability, Kaisamy said.

Kawanishi said the PCCC discusses the content of the training, the curriculum, the teaching materials and so on with Japanese experts.

"On the Japanese side, we are in a position to partner with the PCCC in their implementation. The center staff are very motivated, proactive and full of enthusiasm, making them a very encouraging partner," he said.

As for other stakeholders, he mentions that universities, such as the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, got involved by providing lecturers. Local NGOs provided core lecturers and collaboration with other parties is expected.



Top: Participants take part in a training program on remote sensing technology at the PCCC in November 2019. Above: PCCC Manager 'Ofa Ma'asi-Kaisamy delivers a lecture during a session on accessing climate financing in Fiji in May 2023. PCCC

"In that sense, cooperation with various actors — not just local government agencies — took place during the project," Kawanishi noted.

Implementing the capacity-building project was not without its difficulties, Kawanishi added.

"It was originally intended to be a face-to-face training program, but COVID-19's impact meant that such training could no longer be conducted. To address this situation, we proceeded to develop online programs, and ultimately managed to put together a full range of online training programs and materials," he said, adding that it also laid the foundation for the PCCC to continue offering its own training to related countries even after the project ended.

The center's e-learning platform is one example of innovation.

"It has four key categories: executive courses, webinars, a category for students and young children, and open learning, which anyone

can take. We worked with 12 partners to deliver those courses, from U.N. agencies to universities, and experts that are working in government," Kaisamy said.

Completed in January 2023, the capacity-building project received high praise from the trainees. Theresa Wombon-Kambuy, who works for the Department of Agriculture and Livestock in Papua New Guinea, attended the center's virtual workshop on climate resilience and food production systems. "The lessons learned during the

workshop were that critical thinking was needed to find the problems and causes, and how these causes can become objectives of project implementation. The lessons learned from this program have really helped us," she said.

Facilitating innovation

A new JICA initiative called the Project for Innovative Solutions for Pacific Climate Change Resilience started in March. According to Kawanishi, this project focuses on finding different ways for the region to adapt while enhancing its knowledge brokerage and capacity-building functions as the first project did.

"While the previous project aimed to establish the foundations for training, this time the aim is to achieve more visible results at the action and field level," he said.

Specifically, as part of this project, the PCCC will select supporting organizations for public-private partnership promotions, provide consulting and mentoring services and visit recipient countries in person to encourage the execution of tangible initiatives.

When deciding on the content of the project, Japan listened closely to the PCCC's requests.

"The new project involves cooperation that places great emphasis on innovation. This was something they strongly requested," Kawanishi explained.

Expectations from the PCCC are therefore very high, with Kaisamy noting that it is critical for this new project to add value and to catalyze the center's innovation functions so that effective solutions can be brought to those facing challenges. The PCCC has thus drafted a proposal to submit to the Japanese government to promote innovation, as defined in its strategy and business plan, by focusing on the private sector and opportunities for public-private partnerships.

"The private sector is the critical driver of change in the Pacific, especially in contributing to national climate change adaptation and mitigation goals," Kaisamy noted. "Greater involvement by local private-sector entities in key climate initiatives is necessary to ensure the robust and successful implementation of national policy

goals. Strengthening the public-private sector partnership as well as the relationships between private-sector companies would benefit all parties."

In this regard, Kawanishi emphasized that it is important to pursue a win-win approach to addressing climate change. Since the market size of the Pacific islands is typically smaller than other regions, pursuing synergies with development is key.

"We have also trained whale-watching operators on tourism and climate change and building resilience in the previous project on capacity building with JICA, and we are now looking into engagement with hotels, training them to devise solutions that the communities can use," Kaisamy explained.

What comes next

Kaisamy outlined three future initiatives the center intends to focus on: establishing a climate finance investment hub, creating an innovation lounge and building its human and technical resources capacity.

"Our innovative climate investment hub will deliver long-term investment toward a programmatic approach to addressing climate change for our countries," Kaisamy said, "and is something that our partners can invest in and will be managed by the center. That is the big-ticket item for us."

She also reflected on the PCCC's innovation lounge, now under development, which will showcase and market climate change solutions "like that shopping website, Alibaba. A platform that countries can access and say, 'I want to meet this solution's developer.' The lounge will make that connection between our countries and developers."

The center is also partnering with organizations such as the Climate Finance Access Network and the Asian Institute of Technology's Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific to collaborate with the Green Climate Fund to enable greater capacity for climate finance access for the Pacific region.

The PCCC is also working with the Partners in the Blue Pacific — an informal group aiming to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with Pacific island countries that consists of Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the U.K., Canada, Germany and South Korea — to discuss potential entry points for long-term investment to support the work of the PCCC. Kaisamy noted that she has approached them to secure a long-term investment for the center's work.

Japan strongly supports the commitments articulated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent announced by the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum in 2022 and respects the unity of the region. By adhering closely to the needs of these countries, Japan intends to remain a trusted partner in the region. It will continue to assist Pacific island countries through the PCCC, JICA and other entities as they face the consequences of climate change. The outcome of that battle is significant for everyone on the planet.

Left to right: Former Samoa Prime Minister Tullaepa Sallee Mallelegaol, former SPREP chief Kost Latu, former Japanese Ambassador Shinya Aoki and a Konoike Construction official pose at the PCCC groundbreaking ceremony in 2018. PCCC



Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa stands with SPREP Director-General Sefanaia Nawadra during a visit to the center on Feb. 10. FOREIGN MINISTRY



Members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community take part in a training session on hazard and risk assessment using remote sensing technology at the PCCC in November 2019. PCCC

Pacific sustainability

(Sponsored content)

Pacific islands make advances in sustainability with Japan

Countries dependent on fishing learning how to manage and sustain precious maritime resources

In a world increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability, Japan is making strides in helping the Pacific island countries achieve U.N. Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water).

This goal, part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources. Through the Project on Pacific Islands Capacity Enhancement for Achieving SDG 14, Japan is fostering human resource development in the Pacific region to address pressing challenges in the fisheries sector and promote sustainable marine resource management.

Background and objectives

At the Pacific Islands Forum in 2016, Oceania's leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ocean conservation. The following year, the United Nations Ocean Conference, co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden, highlighted the urgency of placing SDG 14 at the top of the global agenda alongside climate change.

Despite these high-level commitments, practical implementation at the working level has faced significant challenges due to limited human and financial resources. To address this gap, the Japan International Cooperation Agency took the lead in launching the aforementioned Project on Pacific Islands Capacity Enhancement for Achieving SDG 14, aiming to support the Pacific island countries in developing human resources to foster proactive and effective activities toward achieving the goal.

The Management Plan of the Ministry of Fisheries in Fiji (2020-2021) outlines four primary goals: economic development through offshore fisheries, conservation and management of coastal fisheries resources, food security through aquaculture, and quality improvement of administrative services. Human resource development is a common strategy across these goals. In line with this plan, the SDG 14 project promotes the active engagement of fisheries stakeholders in Fiji and other Pacific island countries to implement effective marine conservation and sustainable resource utilization practices.

Sustainable fisheries

The project is being executed in two phases. The first phase, initiated in 2021, involves observing the current situation and analyzing the issues and needs related to marine resource management in Fiji and formulating a strategic action plan. In collaboration with the School of Agriculture,



Fiji's Great Sea Reef, the third-largest barrier reef in the world and home to diverse wildlife, is seen in the distance from the watchtower on Kia Island. JICA

Geography, Environment, Ocean and Natural Sciences at the University of the South Pacific, dubbed Sageons, and the Pacific Committee, the Ministry of Fisheries in Fiji, with support from JICA, developed a comprehensive training curriculum. This curriculum combines practical activities with essential knowledge and skills, ensuring that participants can apply what they learn in real-world scenarios.

Since 2022, seven small projects have been conducted under the SDG 14 project to apply the acquired knowledge in areas such as coastal resource management, aquaculture and fish processing. In 2023, the overall project's scope expanded to include other Pacific island countries, facilitating knowledge exchange and collaborative training. This regional approach allows for the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, fostering a collective effort to achieve SDG 14.

One notable training session, held in February 2022 for the ministry's staff, was co-organized by JICA, USP Sageons and the Pacific Committee. This three-week session provided theoretical knowledge in the aforementioned areas and included field trips for practical experience. Participants gained valuable insights into sustainable fisheries management, which they could immediately apply to their respective roles.

Navneel Singh, a senior fisheries officer at the ministry's Inshore Fisheries Management Division and the main liaison for the SDG 14 project, said the project couldn't have been launched at a better time.

"This project is very timely considering

the severe impact of COVID-19 and other natural disasters on Pacific island countries."

Addressing key challenges

According to Singh, Fiji's fisheries sector faces several challenges, including inadequate data to make informed management decisions, lack of alternative livelihoods for fishers, poor postharvest handling and illegal fishing. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 exacerbated all the other problems.

"When the borders closed due to the pandemic, many people, including those in the private sector, lost their jobs. As a result, they resorted to natural resources for livelihood, significantly contributing to the overharvesting of some of our resources," Singh said. Thanks to the JICA project, Fiji's fisheries officers are taking a series of training programs on how to address these issues, focusing on practical solutions that can be sustained over the long term.

Singh explained that rectifying the lack of good data is one of the focuses of the project. To tackle this problem, Fiji's ministry has improved its data collection processes, allowing better management decisions to be made on issues such as size limits for harvesting invertebrates and understanding breeding seasons for different commodities.

"Before the project, the ministry did not set any management measures for most of the invertebrate species, including seaweed, oysters, lobsters and freshwater mussels, resulting in severe growth overfishing," Singh said. "By collecting and analyzing data, they can set more effective rules for sustainable marine resource management, ensuring that species have the opportunity to grow and reproduce."

He also said that a further challenge is the lack of alternative livelihoods for fishers, especially considering restrictions and rules aimed at conserving marine resources. To mitigate this issue, the ministry has encouraged alternative livelihoods, such as tilapia aquaculture. For instance, the introduction of new strains of genetically improved farmed tilapia has significantly boosted productivity. Fiji will receive 20,000 of these tilapia fingerlings from the WorldFish Center later this year. Since they mature faster

than local strains, the harvest period can possibly be dropped to four months from approximately six.

"This will make farmers very happy because now they have to spend much less time raising the fish before they can be harvested and gaining more income," Singh added.

Another promising initiative is mud crab fattening, which targets the high demand and subsequent illegal harvesting of undersized mud crabs in Fiji. This small project focuses on the village of Vunuku, where fishing pressure on mud crabs in the mangrove rainforest is significant. Fishers often resort to catching smaller crabs than the legally prescribed size, leading to sustainability issues. In this regard, the project involves pilot farming of small mud crabs, equivalent to those typically caught illegally, to study their growth rates and cost efficiency.

In May 2022, the SDG14 project team, in collaboration with the Fiji Ministry of Fisheries Central Division staff and Rajesh Prasad of USP, conducted a workshop in Vunuku. The workshop educated community members on proper fattening methods, including keeping, feeding and weighing the crabs. Three different groups were tested to find the best feed, with one using tuna processing plant waste, another using vegetable scraps and a third using a mix of both.

Subsequently, from Jan. 25 to 27, 2023, Prasad led a training session for 15 of his staff and two community members from Vunuku. This training included lectures on mud crab fattening methods and the importance of resource conservation. At the same time, Prasad and JICA experts conducted workshops in western and northern Fiji until March 2023, addressing overfishing and illegal fishing impacts while promoting sustainable farming practices.

The mud crab fattening project has proven effective in increasing their size, and the ministry continues to monitor its progress. "This initiative has provided fishers with an alternative source of income to reduce their reliance on overfished marine resources," Singh explained.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is yet another pressing issue. The project has taken steps to combat IUU fishing by improving enforcement with a focus on marine products from coral reef areas such as reef fish and lobsters.

According to Singh, JICA helped the ministry set up a watchtower on Kia Island on June 11 to enhance surveillance and control of fishing activities in the region. This initiative is also expected to foster multi-sectoral collaboration in the proper recording and



Fiji fisheries officer Navneel Singh (far left) poses with participants at a training session co-organized by JICA and University of the South Pacific marine school at the USP Marine Campus in Fiji in February 2022. JICA

reporting of incidents, ultimately leading to a reduction in IUU fishing.

Postharvest handling is also a critical area of focus. Improper postharvest handling can result in significant economic losses for fishers.

"The project has provided the fishing association with training and equipment to improve the quality and hygiene of their catch, increasing their economic returns," Singh explained. He also said there are plans to support the sale of processed marine products, such as smoked fish, creating value-added products that can generate higher incomes for fishers.

The project aims to sustain and expand the knowledge and skills gained through ongoing training and regional cooperation.

A vision for sustainable seas

"There is growing interest from other areas in Fiji to learn from this project and apply its best practices in their own communities," Singh said. "As the project's end date approaches next March, the fisheries ministry is expanding some initiatives to rural communities with limited access to the mainland markets, enabling them to learn from the project's success and implement

similar strategies in their own areas." He also noted that the ministry is working to integrate these initiatives into the government program. To this end, they have established associations of fisheries cooperatives and provided boat engines and other resources to support expanded fishing activities.

These continued efforts ensure that the benefits of the project reach more stakeholders, promoting sustainable practices across the nation.

Cooperation within the Pacific region is a vital aspect for the project's future. According to Singh, Vanuatu is actively exchanging knowledge and skills with Fiji, but neighboring countries have shown interest in the project as well. In March, four officers from the Department of Fisheries of Vanuatu visited project sites in Fiji to learn from the challenges and successes of the initiatives. Regional seminars are also planned to provide opportunities for fisheries officers and communities in other Pacific island nations to learn from Fiji's achievements, fostering a collaborative approach to marine conservation.

"In the Pacific region, we have similar resources, environmental factors and socioeconomic issues. We can easily learn from each other on how to manage our resources as a region rather than each country working in isolation," Singh noted.

Future plans include sending participants to Japan to attend JICA's Knowledge Co-creation Program, a form of technical cooperation that supports human resource

development and issue resolution in developing countries. As a participant of the previous program held in Okinawa in October 2022, Singh recalled it as very informative. "Some of the skills and knowledge that we learned during training in Okinawa have been incorporated into the current projects," he said. Many of the former participants are playing an important role in the SDG 14 project by using the JICA's Project Cycle Management method they learned under that program. "This method helps us identify key issues and make proposals for small-scale projects that could bring significant or tangible outcomes to our communities," he said.

Ensuring lasting impact

Sustaining the improvements and knowledge gained from the project is essential for long-lasting impact. The project will establish a road map for human resource development to promote sustainable practices. This road map includes ongoing training, regional seminars and continuous collaboration with various stakeholders, such as the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, development partners and nongovernmental organizations.

The project's emphasis on capacity building ensures that the benefits extend beyond the initial participants. By training fisheries administrators and other stakeholders, the project creates a ripple effect, where knowledge and skills are passed on to others in the community. This approach helps build a strong foundation for sustainable fisheries management in the Pacific region.

The path ahead

Through the Project on Pacific Islands Capacity Enhancement for Achieving SDG 14, JICA is striving to contribute to marine conservation and sustainable resource management in the Pacific region. The project's focus on human resource development, practical training and regional cooperation addresses the critical challenges facing the fisheries sector in Fiji and other Pacific island countries. By fostering a collaborative approach and sharing best practices, the project aims to create a sustainable future for marine resources, benefiting both current and future generations.

Singh highlighted the importance of partnerships in achieving long-term sustainability. "We want to see improvements in the current status of our fisheries resources in the future so that our children, our grandchildren, our great-great-grandchildren and many more generations to come will have the same resources to see, appreciate and enjoy. And we can only do this through partnerships."

Through continued commitment and innovative approaches, the Pacific region is on a path toward ensuring the sustainability of its vital marine ecosystems for generations to come.

Pages 4 and 5 are sponsored by the government of Japan.



Staffers from Fiji's Fisheries Ministry participate in a tilapia aquaculture workshop. JICA



A Vanuatu Fisheries Ministry official (right) and a Fiji Fisheries Ministry official (second from left) visit the village of Vunuku as a young villager weighs mud crabs. JICA



Left: Efforts are underway to fatten mud crabs in the village of Vunuku as the crustaceans are often illegally harvested when they are undersized. Right: Fiji Fisheries Ministry officials collect data at a fish market in a suburb of Suva. JICA



Bonds that bind

Pacific island nations harbor high expectations for Japan

TEVITA SUKA MANGISI
AMBASSADOR OF TONGA



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Decades in the making, the leaders of the Pacific island countries and Japan will meet for their 10th summit known as the Pacific Island Leaders Meeting. First held in 1997, it is a triennial event held in Japan, save for the ninth summit, which was held online because of COVID-19.

The summit is the premiere caucus that will map out and define relations between the Pacific island countries and Japan for the following 3-year cycle. PALM 10 is scheduled from July 16 to 18, and for the first time, it is aligning itself against the seven priorities agreed to by the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum through its 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and its implementing plan. The PALM 10 Declaration and its joint action plan will thus be based on these priority areas of cooperation: regionalism, development, peace and security, economic growth, climate change and disaster risk reduction, ocean and the environment, and technology and connectivity.

PALM is premised upon developing friendships and partnerships through human relations and enduring bonds, known in Japan as *kizuna*. True friendships and relations are founded upon human and personal interactions, which makes PALM unique in light of its experience with the Japan International Cooperation Agency's Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program.

The promotion of understanding among people is the bedrock of good relations and this is achieved especially through the JOCV. These young volunteers live among the Pacific island communities from the village level to the government level and in so doing assist our countries through their expertise at all levels and more importantly, by way of long-lasting friendships and mutual understanding. In my own case, I am currently working with and have reinvigorated my close friendship with a

former volunteer at my high school who was my math teacher. She is now a director at a nonprofit organization that uses projects to assist Tonga's development aspirations. This friendship is 37 years old and still going strong. Such is the unique and special character of this program under JICA, which is part and parcel of the delivery of PALM to the region. It's a win for the Pacific islands and a win for Japan. This is true *kizuna* made, and continually in the making.

The key for Japan's successful presence and its interests in the Pacific islands region is just that — presence. Enhancing its presence through PALM, which then informs the bilateral relationship Japan shares with each country, serves Japan's national interests. What also matters is the form and substance of that presence. The success of it to date, in my view, has been through the JOCV. Presence in my view also means simply visits, particularly high-level visits to the islands by prominent Japanese.

In Tonga's case, his majesty the emperor, as crown prince, visited Tonga twice — including once with her majesty the empress when she was crown princess. Other members of the imperial family have also visited Tonga, thus sealing a special bond between our peoples.

In addition, Tonga will host the annual Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Nuku'alofa this August. By invitation from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as co-chair of PALM 10 next month, the leaders and representatives of the Pacific islands will be in Tokyo to renew and strengthen these bonds through a reinvigorated resetting of the PALM partnership. By invitation also of Tonga's Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku, Kishida has been asked to attend the Pacific islands leaders meeting in Tonga.

In terms of successful presence, Kishida will not only make history as the first prime minister of Japan to attend the annual leaders meeting, but will also solidify his nation's bonds with the region for many, many years to come simply by attending. As history in the making, it thus will be etched forever in the history of relations between the Pacific island countries and Japan. This is the importance of presence and we all eagerly await a hopeful

positive answer to the invitation. Attending the meeting in Tonga in August will be the natural and logical flow from the PALM 10 summit in July.

In the increasingly interesting dynamics of the Pacific islands region, with different matters becoming polarized somewhat because of geopolitical intricacies, such representation by Japan through the prime minister would count as a loud, clear and historic statement, given that similar gestures by other competing interests have yet to come to the fore. How the dynamism of the region will change with the ebb and flow of the interests expressed in our Blue Pacific policy remains to be seen. Being friends to all, Pacific island countries, our governments, and especially the people we serve, will see and feel Japan's presence on our shores as equivalent to a demonstration and recognition of the importance of our relationship and its ongoing strengthening from level to level.

This year, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Tonga was appointed by our seven-member caucus of Pacific island ambassadors to be chair of the group. Our Pacific Island Countries Ambassadorial Group works toward and supports Japan's presence in our shared region. PICAG is fully cognizant also of the dynamics being played out and wishes for Japan to consider positions espoused by the group, which not only serves the interests of the region in terms of sustainable development, but importantly also serves Japan's interests in terms of enhancing its prominence and again, its presence in the region, as a trusted friend in need, both officially and personally. Japan's unique policy of not getting involved in the domestic affairs of each island also raises its profile and is something that should be continued.

As diplomats from the Pacific island countries and Japan work tirelessly to finalize the outcome documents for PALM 10, it is our hope that the fundamental premise of the relationship based on human relations, personal bonds, and people-centered understanding pervades all discussions, for that is the crux and the characteristic that sets our friendship and partnership apart from others, which uniquely places PALM at a different and special level.



Papua New Guinea Charge d'Affaires a.i. Martinez Wasuak, Tongan Ambassador Tevita Suka Mangisi, Micronesia Ambassador John Fritz, Palauan Ambassador Peter Adelbai, Marshall Islands Charge d'Affaires a.i. Lisa Lajkam-Case, and Samoan Ambassador Faalavaau Perina Sila-Tualaulelei pose at the Pacific Island Countries Ambassadors Group meeting at the Embassy of Tonga on Jan. 26.

EMBASSY OF TONGA

JICA offers unwavering promise for the future of island neighbors

AKIHIKO TANAKA
PRESIDENT, JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY



Japan has built a strong bond with the 14 Pacific island countries. Geographic proximity and a shared history, tied through Japanese immigrants and their descendants, has nurtured

this relationship for over 100 years. These isles and many surrounding countries, including Japan, benefit from the rich marine resources and safe navigation in the Pacific. Peace and stability in the Pacific are essential for the global economy. The Japan International Cooperation Agency, a long-time partner, has been working with these island nations to address their critical challenges with respect to their values and their ownership.

In 1970, at the U.N. General Assembly, then-Prime Minister Kamiesse Mara of Fiji invoked the term "Pacific Way" in describing the region's rich and traditional cultures, the cohesion and solidarity of its communities and the unity derived from their cooperation. The Pacific Way includes a consistent philosophy to peacefully decide regional matters through respectful, consultative and inclusive discussions.

After five decades, the Pacific Islands Forum, an intergovernmental organization aiming to enhance cooperation in the region, issued the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, its first long-term development plan for these nations, in 2022. The strategy contains the principles that all development partners should adhere to when working with island nations.

The principles outlined in the 2050 strategy are, however, not new to Japan. Japan has been closely working with Pacific island countries for their nation-building. In 1987, then-Foreign Minister Tadashi Kuranari declared the five principles of Japan's engagement in the Pacific, which would later be dubbed the "Kuranari Doctrine."

The first three principles are respect for independence and autonomy; support for existing arrangements for regional cooperation; and assistance in preserving political stability. The remaining two are the provision of assistance that makes the region more prosperous and the promotion of people-to-people exchanges.

Based on these principles, JICA has supported various development initiatives and projects in the region for the improvement of infrastructure, health, education and,



JICA supports economic activities on remote islands such as Kiribati (above) by rebuilding roads damaged by storm surge, a deadly ocean phenomena exacerbated by rising sea levels. JICA

more recently, environmental protection and climate change adaptation.

Our consistent principle of emphasizing respect for their ownership and meeting local needs has generated solid development results, in addition to forging *kizuna* (enduring bonds) between our peoples.

Our cooperation started with the initial dispatch of volunteers to Samoa in 1972. Since then, nearly 5,000 Japanese volunteers have lived and worked in the region. They have shared their knowledge and expertise with people in various fields and, in turn, learned about their deep-seated values. These volunteers have strong and enduring attachments to the communities and countries where they served.

Another example of our people-to-people connections is through JICA's technical cooperation programs. Japanese experts work together with government officials and improve their ability to respond to their unique challenges, using knowledge and technology accumulated through Japan's history of development. To adapt to climate change and promote sustainable development, JICA has made significant contributions to improve weather forecasting and early warning in the region and strengthen waste management that reflects the specific conditions of each island.

Furthermore, approximately 12,000 officials from these governments and public organizations have come to Japan to participate in JICA's knowledge-sharing and training courses, including scholarship programs. We are delighted that graduates of these programs are now playing key roles in their governments and actively contributing to their national development.

Recently, the region has been the focus of much attention due to geopolitical tensions among major powers. However, as stipulated in the 2050 strategy, the definition of security must adapt to encompass a more inclusive approach to various issues, including human, economic, environmental and digital security, as well as resilience to disasters and climate change. This concept is compatible with the guiding principles of Japan's official development assistance and JICA's mission of "human security."

Human security is a state in which people are free from fear and want and can live with dignity. JICA has supported our partner countries to ensure this concept, which is threatened by complex global challenges. Based on such shared concepts of human security, we are committed to working with the Pacific island countries on development issues in the region.

Islanders of the Pacific have historically experienced the vulnerabilities that island life can present. However, we all have also overcome those difficulties courageously by living with the ocean. Based on the challenges we have jointly faced, JICA will fully utilize our knowledge of the Pacific to support the 2050 strategy and further the development of island nations.

Always keeping JICA's vision of "Leading the World with Trust" in mind, JICA is, and always will be, a trusted partner of the Pacific islands in working together in the Pacific Way for the betterment of people's lives, security and natural resources. We look forward to projecting our voices across the world — together with empathy, resonance and the shared pride of all.



Left: Residents pick up emergency supplies after the deadly Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted in 2022, spawning tsunami that caused heavy damage in Tonga. Right: Tongan Ambassador Tevita Suka Mangisi poses with former Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers at a talk held in April 2023 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the JOCV's arrival in Tonga. EMBASSY OF JAPAN IN TONGA; EMBASSY OF TONGA



Welcoming the delegations to the 10th Pacific Island Leaders Meeting and wishing for their success

Welcoming the Republic of Palau delegation and wishing for their success at the 10th Pacific Island Leaders Meeting

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Left: Students pose with math books received under a project for improving academic ability in elementary schools.



Right: Monitors record environmental data to preserve coastal ecosystems, such as these mangrove forests in Palau. JICA

Taming tourism

Sustaining paradise: Ecotourism seen as way forward

NOAM KATZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Pacific islands, renowned for breathtaking tropical landscapes and crystal-clear waters, are also garnering attention for their place on the front lines in global battles against issues such as overtourism and rising sea levels caused by climate change.

In recent years, the small countries within these islands have increasingly become leaders in ecotourism, emphasizing responsible travel to natural areas, conservation of the environment and the well-being of island communities.

From Palau's marine sanctuaries and Fiji's barrier reef conservation efforts to Vanuatu's guided rainforest hikes and Samoa's successful reforestation, the Pacific islands are demonstrating how tourism can coexist with environmental stewardship for a sustainable future.

Protecting biodiversity

Despite its status as a small island nation in the western Pacific, Palau has gained international acclaim for its pioneering efforts in marine conservation and biodiversity preservation. In 2009, Palau established the world's first shark sanctuary, prohibiting all commercial shark fishing within its waters. The Palau Shark Sanctuary covers about 600,000 square kilometers, nearly as big as Ukraine.

This bold step was prompted by concern over illegal fishing to harvest fins for shark fin soup, as well as deaths resulting from by-catch. Sharks play a critical role as apex predators, maintaining the balance of marine life, which in turn supports Palau's vibrant coral reefs — a major tourist draw and a key component of the country's economy. Moreover, the creation of

the shark sanctuary has had a ripple effect, encouraging other island nations, such as the Maldives, to enact similar measures.

Palau's commitment to marine conservation extends beyond sharks. In 2015, the country designated 80% of its marine territory as a fully protected reserve, prohibiting fishing and mining activities. These initiatives have helped to preserve biodiversity and reinforced Palau's image as a premier destination for eco-conscious travelers.

Reef, mangrove guardians

In Fiji, an archipelago of more than 300 islands in the South Pacific, initiatives to promote environmental conservation are gaining traction, particularly in safeguarding its mangrove forests and coral reefs.

Mangroves are vital coastal ecosystems that provide numerous ecological benefits, including protecting shorelines from erosion, supporting fisheries and sequestering carbon. While tourism has often spurred the destruction of Fiji's mangrove forests, community-led initiatives have been helping to protect and restore these vital habitats. More and more resorts in Fiji are even inviting guests to help plant mangroves around their facilities or donate plants to other islands for reforestation.

One of Fiji's most ambitious conservation projects is the protection of the Great Sea Reef, the third-largest barrier reef system in the world. Known locally as Cakaulevu, the Great Sea Reef stretches over 200 kilometers and is home to an enormous diversity of marine life, including several endangered species. Fiji has implemented various conservation strategies, such as establishing marine protected areas, promoting sustainable fishing practices and engaging communities in reef monitoring and management.

These efforts are integral to Fiji's ecotourism strategy, attracting divers, snorkelers and nature enthusiasts from around the globe. By prioritizing the health of its marine ecosystems, Fiji is ensuring that its natural beauty can be enjoyed by future generations while providing sustainable livelihoods for its people.

Forest hikes, bird watching

The neighboring archipelago of Vanuatu is celebrated for its lush rainforests, vibrant birdlife and rich biodiversity. The country has also embraced ecotourism as a means of promoting environmental conservation while supporting local economies. One of the standout initiatives in Vanuatu is the development of guided rainforest hikes and bird-watching tours, which offer visitors an immersive experience in the island's natural wonders.

These tours are often led by local guides who possess extensive knowledge of the flora and fauna, as well as the cultural significance of the land. This not only provides tourists with a deeper understanding and appreciation of Vanuatu's biodiversity, but also ensures that tourism revenues benefit the surrounding communities.

In addition to ecotourism activities, Vanuatu has implemented several conservation programs aimed at preserving its unique ecosystems. These include reforestation projects, the establishment of conservation areas and initiatives to protect endangered species. By integrating conservation with tourism, Vanuatu is fostering a sustainable model that benefits both residents and the environment.

Planting a greener future

After experiencing a decline in forest size and degraded land areas, the nation of

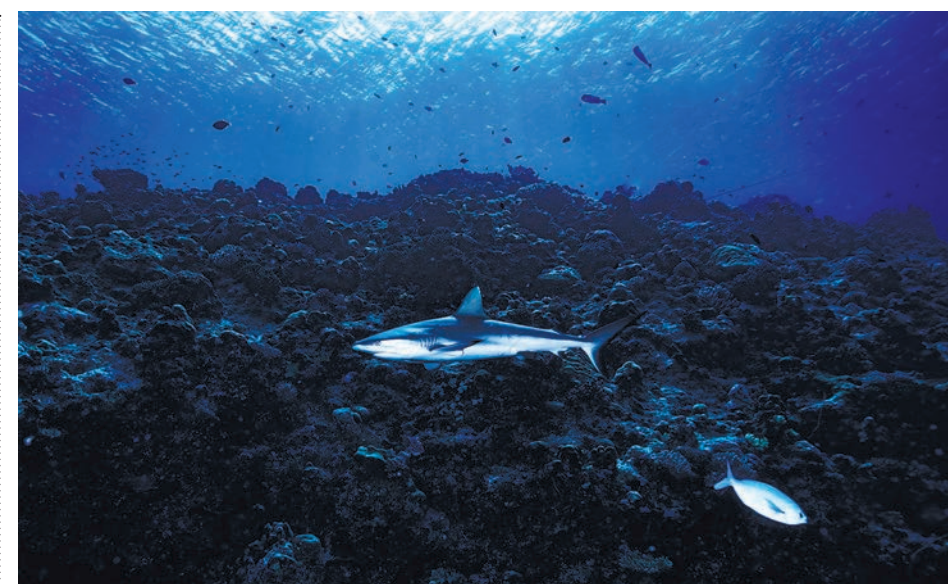
Samoa has launched and already fulfilled ambitious plans to plant trees and ensure sustainable natural resources. From 2009 to 2012, over a million trees were planted across Samoa's 10 islands, followed by over 2 million native and fruit trees planted from 2015 to 2020. The success of these two campaigns then led to the establishment of a new goal set forth in 2022: 3 million trees to be planted by 2028.

This nationwide focus on tree planting has also gone hand in hand with a greater awareness of the need to protect the incredible natural beauty of the islands and practice sustainable ecotourism. The government is working with organizations to reduce the environmental impact of tourists while also promoting hikes and educational tours as a way for them to learn about Samoa's unique ecosystem.

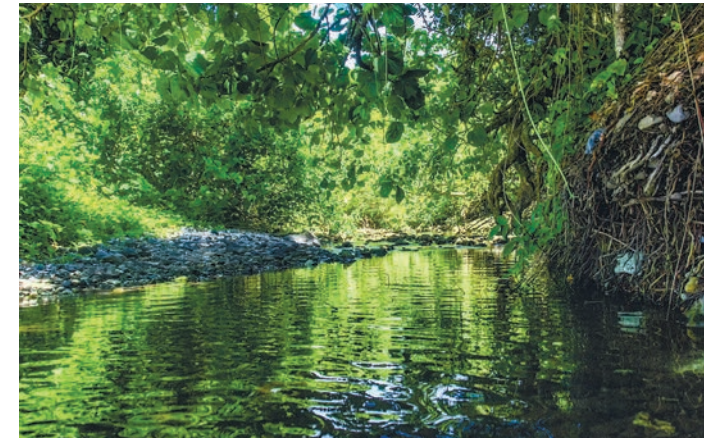
Ecotourism expands

By leveraging their unique natural assets and involving communities in conservation efforts, island nations such as Palau, Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa are setting benchmarks for sustainable tourism. They also highlight the ability to involve overseas travelers in those very sustainability and conservation efforts, a key advantage beyond simply being a resort destination.

As global awareness of environmental issues continues to grow, the Pacific islands illustrate the power of ecotourism in driving positive change for both people and the planet.



Above: Following the creation of the world's first national shark sanctuary, a variety of species, such as the gray reef shark, have a safe haven in Palau. Right: The Ravilevu Nature Reserve is a shining example of Fiji's dedication to preserving mangroves.



GETTY IMAGES



Efate Island in Vanuatu is home to the Mele Cascades and often served as the setting for "Survivor," the reality TV game show.

Working as one toward a sustainable future

ATSUSHI SUNAMI
PRESIDENT, SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION



On behalf of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the government of Japan for hosting the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders

Meeting in Tokyo.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, a private nonprofit organization, has been working to deepen relations between the Pacific island countries and Japan since 1988, when we hosted the first Pacific Island Nations Conference in Tokyo.

Three decades ago, it was crucial for the leaders of the Pacific island countries and Japan to meet and have an open and honest dialogue with each other to build mutual understanding and trust. Today, while the Pacific island countries are diverse societies, they face many common issues, such

as climate change, rising sea levels, natural hazards and disasters, limited access to higher-quality education and public health systems, the energy transition, economic sustainability, solid waste management, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and transnational crime.

In response, the Pacific island countries developed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and launched its implementation plan in November last year to pass on sustainable societies and healthy natural environments to future generations as stewards of the Pacific Ocean.

Japan is essentially a maritime island state like the Pacific island countries, and it is critical to work together to address these challenges in a coherent manner. To this end, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation is working to launch what it calls "Flowers," short for Freely Linked Opportunities with Efforts and Results — a platform for sharing information and practices to promote industry-academia-public-private collaboration among the Pacific island countries, Japan and development partners.

PALM 10 will be the first face-to-face summit in six years. It is an incredibly important




Sasakawa Peace Foundation Honorary Chairman Yohei Sasakawa exchanges gifts with Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine on March 11. SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

opportunity for Japan to rebuild *kizuna* (enduring bonds between people) and trust with the Pacific island countries and the region. I look forward to the outcomes of the summit, which will lay the foundation for the future of the Pacific island countries and Japan for decades to come.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

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Democrat vs. Republican
America vs. China
White vs. Black
Economy vs. Ecology
Wealth vs. Health
Urban vs. Rural
Government vs. People
Dogs vs. Cats
Coffee vs. Tea
Man vs. Woman
Monopoly vs. Share
Privacy vs. Surveillance
Politics vs. Science
Think vs. Do
Reject vs. Embrace
You vs. Me
Argument vs. Dialogue

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