



The Commodification of Ocean Breaches *TABU/TAPU*
(A question of sanctity)
A Statement on Deep-Sea Mining, Self-Determination,
and the Future of Solwata/Solwara (Saltwater) Peoples of the Pacific

The Annual Members' Meeting of The Council for World Mission (CWM), a global partnership of thirty-six Member Churches, issues this statement in response to the growing promotion of deep-sea mining (DSM) in the Pacific (Pasifika) and beyond. Rooted in the *missio Dei*, we stand with Pasifika Island member churches and communities whose cultures, identities, livelihoods, and spiritualities are deeply connected to the ocean.

CWM affirms that the ocean is not a resource to be plundered, but a sacred inheritance: source of identity, relationship, sustenance, and life. Every proposal to industrialise the seabed must be judged against this truth. To highlight the sacredness of Pasifika's oceanic inheritance, we want to name that inheritance through a recognised Pasifika name for the ocean: *Moana*.

“The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1). The *Moana* belongs to God: not an empty frontier to be conquered, but a sacred trust to be protected. We reject any vision of development that sacrifices ecological integrity for economic gain.

As churches committed to God's mission of justice, reconciliation, and abundant life, we affirm that the *Moana* is woven into Pasifika identity, culture, spirituality, livelihood, and future. A wound to the *Moana* is a wound to communities, ecosystems, and the whole *fale/whare/vuvale/baamle* (household) of creation.

We heed the concerns of churches, Indigenous peoples, scientists, and civil society about the ecological and social consequences of deep-sea mining. We honour the prophetic witness of Pasifika churches, which proclaim creation as reflective of God's life-giving presence rather than a commodity, and call the wider church to care for creation, and to respect the *vā* (relational space) with creation, as a combined act of faithfulness to God and duty to future generations.

Deep-sea mining cannot be separated from histories of colonialism, extraction, and economic systems that place profit above people and planet. It risks perpetuating *Oceania Nullius*—the false assumption that the *Moana* is uninhabited and exists for exploitation and that Pasifika voices can be set aside. As a movement committed to decolonising mission, CWM challenges practices that undermine ecological integrity, justice, and the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Deep-sea mining must also be understood amid the climate crisis already bearing down on Pasifika nations. Rising seas, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and severe weather threaten communities across the region.

For low-lying atoll nations such as Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands, climate change is an existential reality, with displacement and relocation carrying profound implications for identity, culture, sovereignty, and ancestral belonging. Their *fenua*, their *fanua*, their *te aba* and their *āne*— their lands—are sinking. *Fanua/fenua* are not just words for ‘land’ but also for the mother’s placenta, pointing to Pasifika peoples belonging and being birthed from the land.

When we think of the related Māori term, *whānau* (extended family and process of giving birth), we are reminded that in the Creation story, the ocean came first, before human life. The priority of ocean-life led to our being birthed into being. Therefore, the loss of land is never merely physical; it is the loss of heritage, memory, and sacred relationship with place. Communities already carrying the burden of climate injustice must not be asked to bear new risks from deep-sea mining.

As we consider marginalisation, we recognise the margins now pressing upon many island nations: rising waters, threatened homelands, and decisions made without those most affected. The *vā* has been breached and continues to be breached. Who will speak for Divine Life from the depths if the people of Oceania are not heard? With the Psalmist, who writes, “Out of the depths, we cry to you...” (Psalm 130:1), and with Pasifika peoples, we hear the depths themselves crying out.

CWM affirms the right of Pasifika peoples to self-determination and to free, prior, and informed consent in all decisions affecting their lands, waters, resources, and futures. Development must be shaped by the aspirations, wisdom, and wellbeing of Pasifika peoples, not imposed by external economic or geopolitical interests.

Therefore, the Annual Members' Meeting:

Calls upon Governments, International Institutions, and Regional Bodies

- To uphold environmental protection laws relating to mining and cease granting exploration and extraction licences to deep-sea mining companies;
- To ensure Indigenous peoples, local communities, religious communities, and civil society are meaningfully involved in decisions on deep-sea mining;
- To uphold the sovereignty and self-determination of Pasifika nations and peoples in shaping their own futures and development pathways;
- To respect free, prior, and informed consent for all communities affected by deep-sea mining;
- To prioritise ecological sustainability, community wellbeing, and intergenerational justice over short-term economic gain;
- To address sea-level rise and climate change in ways that protect the rights, dignity, culture, and sovereignty of affected communities.

Calls upon Member Churches

- To deepen theological reflection on creation care, ocean justice, climate justice, and ecological discipleship.
- To accompany communities affected by environmental degradation, climate change, displacement, and extractive industries.
- To advocate for policies that protect creation and promote life-flourishing communities.
- To uphold Indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights to self-determination and meaningful participation.
- To strengthen ecumenical and interfaith collaboration on ecological challenges facing Pasifika.

Commits CWM

- To amplify the voices of Pasifika churches and communities in global ecumenical and international forums.
- To support theological education and formation for ecological justice, ocean stewardship, and decolonising mission.
- To accompany advocacy protecting oceans, ecosystems, and vulnerable communities.
- To challenge systems and structures that commodify creation and prioritise profit over people and planet.
- To promote development rooted in justice, sustainability, dignity, self-determination, and the flourishing of all creation.
- To advocate for climate justice and the rights of communities threatened by sea-level rise, displacement, and loss of homeland.

We stand with the peoples and churches of Pasifika. We reject the exploitation of the deep sea where consequences remain uncertain, far-reaching, and potentially irreversible. We affirm the sacredness of creation, the dignity of all peoples, and the right of communities to determine their own futures.

The Annual Members' Meeting calls upon governments, corporations, international institutions, churches, and communities to act with wisdom, humility, courage, and accountability, so future generations may inherit oceans that sustain life, lands that nurture belonging, and a world that reflects the justice of God.

The Moana is not a commodity.

It is *mea'alofo* (gift), it is *tofi* (inheritance), and it is *tapu* (sacred obligation)—held in faith, by the peoples of the *Moana*, for generations yet to come.