



GEF IW R2R/ RSC.6/WP.02

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**Sixth Regional Steering Committee Meeting (Virtual) for the  
GEF Pacific International Waters Ridge to Reef Project entitled:**

*Ridge to Reef – Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest &  
Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon,  
Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries*

Suva, Fiji 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022

**DECLARATION FOR MAINSTREAMING THE RIDGE TO REEF  
APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC  
REGION**

***Zero Draft – version 4***

**Summary:**

The application of the ridge to reef (R2R) concept is widely documented and known in the Pacific region as well as in other parts of the globe. R2R is also universally acceptable as a best practice management tool supporting integrated ecosystem-based approaches to conserve and manage ecosystems cross-sectorally from land to sea.

In this region, the R2R approach is already featured in a range of integrated programmes and efforts by all stakeholders, donors, partners and communities to conserve and manage natural resources.

To better strengthen and coordinate future R2R planning and investments, a zero draft declaration has been prepared to support and add value on resource mobilization demonstrating resilience, commitments and affirmations across stakeholders, institutions, and communities to integrate and mainstream R2R in domestic policy and legislative frameworks.

The draft declaration will be considered at the Investment Forum and RSTC meeting, and a final revised version will be presented to the RSC. The declaration is intended to seek support and signatures from participating agencies and countries at this meeting and other interested parties at all levels of society. The declaration will be accessible online the R2R website for others who may wish to submit their support and signatures.

The meeting is invited to review and endorse the final draft of the declaration and thereby opens for signatures.

## DECLARATION FOR MAINSTREAMING THE RIDGE TO REEF APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC REGION

### ***PREAMBLE***

***Recalling*** the cultural significance Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) place on their land and sea, as well, the spiritual connection of Pacific peoples to the biological diversity offers by the various ecological systems along the highland ridges to the reef and the ocean connectivity.

***Further recalling*** considerable variation in size and geomorphology of PICs with over 6,000 islands and islets ranging from high volcanic islands to tiny low coral atolls and have correspondingly varied economies and systems of governance. In this regard, PICs represent the microcosms of some of the most significant development and environment challenges the world faces.

***Recognising*** that the cultural and spiritual links of Pacific peoples with their land-sea adequately demonstrated through a range of traditional, conventional and modern systems of maintaining and enhancing PICs ecosystem goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural) through integrated approaches which hinge on the carrying capacity of natural resources.

***Underlining*** the direct links between investments supporting integration efforts by all stakeholders, donors, partners and communities to manage natural resources and conserve wetlands, while leveraging the community-to-cabinet approach ensuring cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder coordination, learning, and knowledge management.

***Further underlining*** that the integration of water, land, forest, biodiversity, and coastal/ ocean natural resources and environmental management to preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, store carbon, improve climate resilience, reduce poverty and sustain livelihoods, are important priority goals for all Pacific peoples, while also delivering significant global environmental benefits.

***Recognising*** their limited land area, PICs continue to experience intense competing pressures on land-sea resources for agriculture, tourism, transport, water, mining, fisheries, energy and other needs. The impacts of climate change and the recent COVID-19 pandemic remain top priority in the Pacific region. This calls for direct investments to support blue-green initiatives to strengthen and increase productivity in key sectors of Pacific islands' economies.

***Acknowledging*** PICs continue to confront the reality of ensuring sustainable management of terrestrial and marine natural resources and heritage, from the local to global levels, and the adaptation of individuals, communities and states to climate and environmental change and natural hazards. Notably, PICs ongoing need and urgency to prepare and respond to disasters and population related consequences remains.

**Also acknowledging** the various drivers that led to excessive unsustainable exploitation and exploration of resources in waters beyond the reefs and national jurisdictions, if not managed, can have devastating impacts on humanity.

**Recognising** the experiences and lessons learned and achieved from past integrated natural resource programmes demonstrably supported and addressed national priorities and development needs while delivering global environmental benefits or ecosystem goods and services that improve biodiversity, land degradation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and international waters.

**Further recognising** experience has shown that an integrated approach from ridge to reef and beyond is necessary for poverty reduction, sustainability, and capacity enhancement for small countries with few human resources to undertake projects. Therefore, each country planned and adopted, considering the importance of cross-sectoral integration, specific aspects of R2R and selected its own innovative and management approaches for testing covering: -

watershed catchment and coastal management, water/ sanitation management practices & agriculture systems, terrestrial/coastal/marine protected areas, rehabilitation of degraded habitats (forest, coral reefs, mangroves, wetlands), climate change adaptation/mitigation and DRR/DRM, and enhancing land-sea ecosystems connectivity.

**Noting** that the national and regional projects make up the Ridge to Reef program, not only responded to national priorities with global environmental benefits, but also responded to the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation and multiple sections of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Law of the Sea, Sustainable Development Goals, Rio+20 Outcomes Document, Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Samoa Pathway, and as a necessary step toward reducing poverty and sustaining island livelihoods.

**Acknowledging** that innovative capacity building programs and partnership with the academic community remained key to sustaining program impact by developing local human capital and a network of local leaders/chiefs and enabling the transition to integrated ridge to reef approaches.

**Recognising** that the R2R program was the testing ground for longer term replication, mainstreaming and scaling up of innovative integrated natural resources management approaches that may be applicable for the Pacific SIDS and other regions. Notably, the R2R program was also designed to prepare the countries for up-scaling by providing the requisite supportive governance in terms of mainstreamed enabling policies, responsive institutions, and trained personnel.

**Underlining** that the R2R approach provides the appropriate framework for multi-focal projects addressing environmental and natural resource management issues in priority catchments and their linked coastal areas, as initially envisage in the Strategic Action Programme for International Waters of the Pacific Islands Region approved by Pacific Forum Leaders.

***Also underlining*** policy actions in each R2R focal area intended to complement each other to promote a truly integrated approach in managing biological diversity and other natural resources. The R2R program seeks to focus on innovation, testing, and catalyzing implementation of cutting-edge methodologies, technology and policy reforms with the objective of enabling replication and future scaling-up of integrated R2R approaches.

**WE, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES,  
PARTNER AGENCIES, CIVIL SOCIETIES, ACADEMIA AND  
COMMUNITIES THEREFORE:**

***Adopts and declares*** support for the application of the ridge to reef concept as an integrated approach to natural resource governance, sustainable use and management, and climate resilience cross-sectorally along the land to sea continuum.

***Further declares and affirms*** support for a three-stage R2R mainstreaming with a unifying gender and socially inclusive message be communicated, disseminated, and discussed in the PICs, such that:

*“Optimising benefits of R2R mainstreaming by ensuring that natural capital (ecosystems and the EGS they provide) are sustainably transformed into environmental, economic and financial assets based on governance-oriented, holistic, gender and socially inclusive, sustainable and resiliency-focused processes”.*

- (i) Scaling up communication, advocacy, and social marketing campaigns based on spatial, bio-geological, climatic, policy, governance and stakeholders’ integrated analysis and unifying message of optimising R2R benefit flows in PICs’ land-sea areas;
- (ii) Replicating participatory integrated R2R site planning with envisioned R2R benefit flows at the local, sub-national, and national levels; and
- (iii) Replicating R2R implementation of approved integrated R2R site plans to realise R2R benefit flows at the local, sub-national and national levels.

**MADE ON 21<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 2022 AT THE FINAL REGIONAL STEERING  
COMMITTEE OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL WATERS  
RIDGE TO REEF PROJECT**