

Speech: Melanie Hopkins remarks at the Launch of the One Ocean Hub in Fiji

USP Vice Chancellor Professor Pal Ahluwalia, distinguished guests, One Ocean Hub teams from the UK, South Africa, West Indies and the Solomon Islands, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

To survive and prosper, we need healthy oceans.

In the words of Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Ocean is at the heart of our cultures and we depend on it for food, income, employment, transport and economic development.

I am delighted to be here today to announce an award to the University of the South Pacific of a £1.6 million research grant through the UK's Research and Innovation's Global Challenges Fund. This will enable researchers from USP to partner with its One Ocean Hub teams as they work at addressing the urgent challenges of oceans law, science and governance.

Led by researchers from the University of Strathclyde in the UK, one aspect of the research is to support decision making based on evidence of risks and opportunities among competing ocean uses.

This research will greatly assist in coral reef management and monitoring invasive marine species management, conservation of threatened and migratory marine species such as sea turtles and whales, waste management and pollution control.

Last year the United Kingdom was honoured to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. The need for greater Commonwealth cooperation on both climate and oceans were at the heart of that meeting, including agreement to create a new Commonwealth Blue Charter.

So Commonwealth countries coming together to agree new standards on the ocean protection can create real change for the entire planet.

For the British government, oceans is the new frontier in our partnership with the Pacific region.

Today's announcement is part of a wider package of cooperation on oceans:

- In 2016, the British government launched in the Pacific the Commonwealth Marine Economies which enables Pacific SIDS to utilise world-leading expertise in marine science from the United Kingdom. Delighted that some of the scientists are with us today.
- Vanuatu and the UK are co-chairing the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance action group on marine plastics. United Kingdom has announced a further £10m of funding to support members to tackle the scourge of

marine plastics. UK Parliamentary Under – Secretary was in Vanuatu last week for a regional meeting with Pacific counterparts to pledge UK's willingness to work with the Pacific.

Last year, of course, we celebrated USP's 50th anniversary. I was delighted to accompany TRH Duke and Duchess of Sussex to USP where they announced 4 new climate scholarships.

And I am delighted to be back at USP again today to announce this new package of UK assistance. I congratulate you for winning this prestigious grant and hope that this will mark a new high point in Commonwealth partnership on oceans management.

Thank you and vinaka vakalevu.