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MEDIA RELEASE

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BLENDING TRADITION AND SCIENCE FOR THE PACIFIC TO THRIVE

The Pacific and its partners need to re-imagine and rejuvenate agriculture and food systems to make best use of the boundless potential of the region for food and nutrition security. We must tap into our small populations to blend tradition with modernity if we are to thrive in a post-Covid, politically dynamic and climate-driven world.

This was the key message of Dr Audrey Aumua, Member of the Policy Advisory Council of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and CEO of The Fred Hollows Foundation NZ, in her Sir John Crawford Memorial Address *“Food and Nutrition Security in the Pacific and the Road Ahead for Small Islands and Developing States.”* Dr Aumua will be addressing the Crawford Fund’s Conference, Australia’s key food security event, titled *“Celebrating Agriculture for Development – Outcomes, Impacts and the Way Ahead”* being held on 15 and 16 August in Parliament House, Canberra and online. The conference will also be addressed by Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon Murray Watt.

“Along with the beauty of the Pacific comes the harsh reality of environmental changes, pandemics and economic pressures. Hanging over it all is a more rapidly changing climate, leading to sea level rise, droughts, infectious diseases, unsustainable development, food and nutrition challenges and threats to livelihoods and traditional ways of life,” said Dr Aumua, who has extensive experience in research, policy development and management throughout the Pacific, has worked in regional development and held a variety of regional leadership roles across the Pacific.

“Agriculture and fishing are not just sources of food – they are vital for livelihoods. Across the countries of the Pacific, 50 – 70% of people depend on agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods.”

“This Blue-Green Pacific economy is facing both slow shocks, such as deteriorating water quality and availability, deterioration of coastal ecosystems, degraded soils and loss of plant genetic diversity, and rapid shocks such as extreme climate and natural events, increases in invasive plant pests and animal diseases, economic disruption from the pandemic and now other global events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.”

“It is time that we better support these nations with our resources and our technology to find new ways to feed their communities.”

“We must be careful to adopt a holistic approach to food and food systems and the blue-green economy, with heedfulness to current quandaries including nutrition, non-communicable diseases, food production and movement, rising seas, climate change, loss of traditional knowledge and customs, lagging science and technology, and the struggle to achieve gender equity and be mindful to include the underserved communities including women and youth.”

“New thinking and new tools for our new times must blend with the old agricultural knowledge, traditions and culture that have fed Pacific people supported for generations and supported their communities. But vital traditional knowledge and customs cannot realize progress without merging them with modern science and technology.”

“Every step we take towards ensuring the Pacific has a sustainable, regionally based healthy food system, will be a step towards better and more secure livelihoods for all,” she concluded.

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