



**GOVERNMENT OF NIUE  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT**

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**HON. TOKE TALAGI  
THE HONORABLE DEPUTY PREMIER OF NIUE  
AND  
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

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**Opening Address**

Distinguished Delegates to the 8<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Meeting, Organisers, UNDP, SPREP, WWF & WCC please allow me to also extend my government's appreciation for your joint effort and cooperation in bringing into fruition this event. Please allow me to acknowledge also, the support by Greenpeace given to us in our short time here.

As most of you know, Cyclone Heta struck Niue for 5 hours on 5<sup>th</sup> January with winds reaching up to 275km/hr and mountainous seas of over 50 metres.

Cyclone Heta was considered a grade five in magnitude, it was by far the worst in our living history and certainly an experience that my country will never forget.

Prior to the devastation that Tropical Cyclone Heta inflicted, issues such as declining population and non-sustainable revenue sources were challenging our unique national identity, culture and sovereignty.

Such issues remain challenges but are now compounded by the devastation caused by cyclone Heta.

Despite this, we also have the chance to take advantage of unique opportunities.

Our government approved the NISP for 2003-2008 late last year.

The cyclone Heta Recovery Plan incorporates the recovery programme into the NISP. This therefore provides the links, which are particularly important in ensuring that we maintain our vision and goals but allowing for changes brought about by Heta.

Full consultation with all stakeholders was completed prior to the formalisation and finalisation of the recovery plan.

In addition to environmental initiatives that are included in the recovery plan are those, which remain outstanding, which will be addressed at this event.

The establishment of the new department of environment has been timely since it allows focus on the environmental issues. Prior to this environmental issues were included and covered by three departments.

The Environment Act 2003 was finally passed into legislation late last year marking a milestone in our commitment to the environment of Niue. The Act establishes in addition to the new department, a national council for sustainable development. The new department essentially is now faced with many challenges, one being its survival despite a lack of resources and the additional burden of managing a crippled and devastated environment without an office.

Assessments carried out following Cyclone Heta indicate that the cost of recovery far outweigh our ability as a nation to recover. For example, damage to civil society, the private and public sector amounts to over \$37,000,000.

The estimated damage to biodiversity including forests, agriculture and native species is approximately \$50,000,000.

Essentially, the cost to our natural and economic base far outweighs our ability to recover on our own, the survival of our small nation is dependent on the generosity of the international community and regional friends.

In addition to our commitment to rehabilitate and recover, members of civil society have also mobilised and are assisting our government in conservation in particular of birds and native biodiversity which is still integral to our society and culture. To that end, our government is committed to building partnerships with local NGOs to assist with the recovery of our natural resources. This commitment to partnerships is manifested in a national feeding programme for wildlife in particular for the fruit bat and pigeon population, which is severely depleted.

Our original national five year plan 2003-2008 development plan 'Halavaka ke he Monuina', a 'Prosperous Niue' was sought through a range of strategies such as:

- Promoting an unspoilt and unique environment supporting sustainable environmental practices such as a managed fishery and organic farming.
- Encouraging a vibrant private sector offering employment and investment opportunities to both locals and those wishing to make Niue their home.
- Supporting a flourishing tourism industry.

Our goals as a country have not changed. Our plan now incorporates the extra burden of rebuilding our nation as part of a systematic programme towards sustainable development.

Our priorities identified in our national strategies and the NBSAP are linked and the new challenges to recovery of the environment have come to the fore and we are committed to addressing all of these priorities within our capacity and means as well as assistance from the international community.

WE recognise that every aspect of society is interwoven and recovery must address our social, economic, infrastructural and environmental needs in a holistic manner.

It is my hope and that of my nation that donor agencies represented here will find areas of interest and activities that will lead to new partnerships either with our government or with civil society whilst advancing your goals and those of our small nation. We know we have a long way to go but we cannot afford to be deterred from a cause that is both urgent and imperative.

Because, ultimately, what you and we achieve in addressing the challenges of vulnerability, recovery and sustainable development in Niue will impact on our children for generations to come.