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## A Hawai'i Venue and an Arctic Model for a Pacific Climate Resiliency Agreement

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**Anukriti Hittle, Visiting Scholar at the East-West Center, explains that “[On the pending Pacific Region Climate Resiliency Agreement,] lessons can be taken from the Arctic Council, covering another vast and diverse area of the world, and applied to the Pacific region for countries to take concerted collective action.”**

On the vast, watery continent of Oceania, collaboration among countries is a challenge. This challenge is amplified when dealing with the complex problem of climate change--an issue that requires focused collective action. At the global level, such action is finding momentum following the COP21 meetings in Paris under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Because island nations are on the frontline of impacts from climate change, a Pacific Agreement for dealing with climate resiliency is urgently needed. A central role for the United States is essential in making this agreement a success, and Hawai'i could serve as a “hub” for such an agreement; comprising Pacific Island countries and Pacific Rim countries alike. To address climate change resiliency effectively, the agreement would benefit from a concrete and streamlined structure. Lessons can be taken from the Arctic Council, covering another vast and diverse area of the world, and applied to the Pacific region for countries to take concerted collective action.

At the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC), the proposed Pacific Region Climate Resiliency Agreement motion calls upon “Pacific Island members of the IUCN to initiate a blueprint for a Pacific Region Climate Resiliency Agreement as an addendum to COP21 Paris Agreement to address the climate crisis in the Pacific region.” The motion proposes to use Hawai'i as a central point for a “bi-annual event that hosts all participants to the regional Pacific climate resiliency agreement.” The agreement would address and coordinate “the effects of climate change on communities around the Pacific by sharing technology, indigenous wisdom, and financial resources to work towards Pacific resiliency.”

While discussions are ongoing as to what form this agreement will eventually take, it is clear that Hawai'i's well-developed physical, institutional and policy infrastructure, combined with geographic advantage, give it an edge to carry out climate-smart work and serve as a center for a Pacific resiliency agreement. Whether a national or sub-national level agreement is formulated, Hawai'i has experience that could be very useful to the agreement's members, including federal and state partnerships focused on environmental issues within the state and in the broader Pacific region. Co-management, as exemplified in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, and networks such as the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative highlight existing partnerships between government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Federal agencies, such as the National Park Service, that work in the lands and waters of the Pacific, currently address climate change adaptation and resiliency through region-wide strategies in the US Affiliated Pacific Islands.

Hawai'i itself has new initiatives that address resiliency and provide a sound knowledge base for the agreement. The Hawai'i Climate Adaptation Initiative Act (Act 83) passed

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by the legislature in 2014, demonstrates Hawai’i’s commitment to climate change issues. The Act formed an interagency committee at the state level to report on statewide impacts till 2050. The committee’s focus on sea level rise, and its climate adaptation portal provide exemplary tools for use in a Pacific agreement.

Once the new Pacific Agreement’s structure is discussed and established, streamlining will be essential for maximum effectiveness. Such collective action is not unprecedented even within the unwieldy UN system where all nations vote in the General Assembly but only a subset of in the Security Council get involved in matters where swift action is needed.

A useful template already exists in the form of the Arctic Council, and its structure can serve as a model for the new Pacific Agreement. A non-UN entity, the Council is more a forum that has directly involved only the Arctic countries, though its restricted membership may well change as the Arctic opens up for minerals exploration, navigation, and recreation. So far, the Arctic Council’s main role has been to identify and set priorities for action around Arctic resource development. The Council has no convention, binding treaty, or legal status, and yet, action has been achieved within its framework. Most notable are the 2011 Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic and the 2013 Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic. Such achievements are partly attributable to the streamlined structure of the Council. In fact, if it grew in membership, it would need to make structural changes to achieve outcomes. At the heart of its effectiveness is the basic idea of having only directly relevant countries and institutions at the center of negotiations and action. This lesson should be applied to the Pacific Region Climate Resiliency Agreement, with three key structural requirements:

- Pacific nations and sub-national entities should be at the **core**, much like the eight Arctic nations that are at the center of the Arctic Council. A *rotating chairmanship*, alternating between Pacific Island and Rim countries or institutions would mirror a similar process in the Arctic Council. The main activities of the group would be carried out through *working groups* that would produce reports and publications to inform the business and decisions of the Agreement’s members.
- Six **Permanent Participants** of the Arctic Council support its members. They are affected directly by the issues, but are not necessarily the decision makers—such as the Saami Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Council. In a Pacific Agreement, Permanent Participants would comprise indigenous peoples forums that are most affected. This would allow groups that are most vulnerable and have contributed in very small part to the problem, to have a compelling and central voice. Permanent Participants would advise on central issues of resiliency and adaptation issues, and have input into decisions, and provide monitoring.
- Other nations and institutions would play **observer** roles, providing scientific, cultural, technical input—much as observer nations do for the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Council model highlights how entities that are directly affected must be at the center of the action, while others can provide a supportive role of research and observation. Using modern technology and ancient wisdom, the Pacific region could pull resources together most efficiently to apply to the challenge of coordination for climate action and resiliency. The United States, as one of the major players in the region, and Hawai’i, with its strong policy and institutional infrastructure, could provide leadership as the center of such an agreement, and lead the way to attain common goals through collective action in the Pacific.

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