



**PACIFIC TOURISM  
ORGANISATION**  
ANNUAL REPORT 2020





# VISION

OUR PACIFIC ISLANDS EMPOWERED AND  
BENEFITTING FROM SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

# MISSION

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INNOVATIVE  
PARTNERSHIPS ERD AND BENEFITTING FROM SUSTAINABLE TOURISM





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# Chairperson's Message

*Kia Orana!*

As we take this opportunity to reflect on the past year, the global COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly stand out as a defining feature, which has devastated national economies and our Pacific Tourism industry.

However, these challenges have also prompted us to reimagine tourism in our region and this presents an invaluable opportunity to ensure that we remain accountable to the future generations of our shared Blue Pacific, through the advancement of sustainable tourism development initiatives based on key national and regional priorities.

This process began for SPTO close to two years ago, when the Board agreed to prioritize sustainable tourism and digital marketing. As a result, at the operational level, the reconfiguration of the organisation has been successfully implemented to ensure that SPTO is conducive to achieving these key outcomes.

On that note SPTO has progressed important regional strategies and strengthened strategic relationships as follows:

- **SPTO-NZMFAT Partnership**

Following long-term advocacy and engagement, SPTO and NZMFAT signed a grant funding agreement in October, focused on organisational development and COVID-19 tourism recovery. Phase 2 hinges on the successful completion of Phase 1 by SPTO, and the business case developed under the SPTO Digital Strategy.

- **Pacific Sustainable Tourism policy Framework (PSTPF)**

Accounting for the priorities of Pacific countries and territories, the regional organisations, the tourism industry and key partners, the PSTPF will provide an overarching strategic direction for planning, development, and management of sustainable tourism in the Pacific.

- **Pacific Tourism Statistics Strategy**

This strategy will expand on the Pacific Tourism Statistics Assessment while also complementing the PSTPF. It will deliver a robust impact monitoring plan in addition to addressing issues such as the development of consistent methodologies, the standardizing of frameworks and classifications, and the encouraging of collaboration and engagement on key issues.

- **SPTO Digital Strategy**

In preparation for Phase 2 funding support from NZMFAT, the SPTO Digital Strategy will account for overall digitalization of the organisation which will precede the digital transformation of NTOs by way of capacity building and the provision of technical assistance and hardware.

This work underpins SPTO's commitment to driving the transformation of Pacific Tourism, through a lens of inclusive prosperity, protection of cultural heritage and natural resources, cooperation and resilience. However, our success is reliant on a shared vision and concerted efforts, for although we are each unique we must remain united in our commitment to a more responsible and sustainable tourism industry that can respond to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

*Kia Manuia*



**HALATOA FUA**  
Chairperson,  
SPTO

# Chief Executive Officer's Message

*Warm Pacific Greetings!*



The year 2020 was exceptionally difficult with the COVID-19 pandemic presenting a series of unprecedented impacts and challenges for many industries around the world, but particularly for global tourism and our Pacific Tourism industry.

As a key economic driver for many Pacific Island countries, tourism has traditionally been a main contributor to regional gross domestic product (GDP) and has also been a key enabler in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through varying engagements with women, youth and rural communities to name a few.

In order to reactivate this momentum during the course of the pandemic, SPTO quickly adapted to engaging on virtual platforms to maintain key relationships, strengthen its relevance to stakeholders, and to fulfil advocacy and governance functions. To that end, the secretariat initiated and participated in a range of key activities and forums which included the following:

## **SPTO COVID-19 Response**

- **Pacific Wave Recovery Feedback**  
SPTO initiated a survey to gauge the impacts of COVID-19 on its private sector membership base.
- **Pacific Tourism: COVID-19 Impact and Recovery Report**  
Contracted by NZMFAT and developed in consultation with SPTO, the report outlined the initial impacts and emerging responses across the Pacific, to COVID-19.
- **SPTO COVID-19 Recovery Strategy**  
Developed to guide and support COVID-19 recovery efforts by SPTO and its membership, the strategy addressed expected challenges, strengths, and opportunities and recovery options.
- **United Nations Pacific Virtual Concert**  
In partnership with Travel Foundation, a UK-based NGO, SPTO produced a 30-second video for the *Always Pacific* campaign to promote Pacific Tourism at the Pacific Unite Virtual Concert, which screened worldwide on 15<sup>th</sup> August. The concert featured artists from the Pacific and attracted support from global figures like HRH Prince of Wales, who officially opened the concert.
- **Pacific Tourism: Scenario Development and Recovery Pathways Report**  
Another collaboration between SPTO and NZMFAT, this second and final report highlighted high level recovery response scenarios for the Pacific Tourism industry.



- **SPTO Development Partner Roundtable**  
Presentation of the Pacific Tourism: Scenario Development and Recovery Pathways Report to existing and potential development partners to encourage support for regional recovery projects.

### **SPTO Regional and International Advocacy Initiative**

- **SPTO Regional Tourism Workshop on Strengthening Tourism Statistics and Sustainability in the Pacific**  
With funding support from NZMFAT and Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), SPTO and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) held a workshop to discuss the initial findings of the regional statistics analysis undertaken by PARIS 21 and to lay the foundation for the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework.
- **Conference and Policy Dialogue on Blue Economy, Ocean Tourism and Sustainable Blue Financing**  
This was a valuable opportunity for SIDS government officials in Asia and the Pacific to learn about sustainable development of ocean economy and policy strategies for promoting ocean tourism and blue financing amidst climate change. As an organizing partner, SPTO was well profiled at the event and given the opportunity to address key activities and perspectives.
- **Fiji Forward Business Economic Development Round Table Discussion**  
This meeting organised by the US Embassy in Fiji was an introduction to the US Economic Recovery Grant Funding Project. SPTO shared this information with eligible countries and submitted a joint proposal with Travel Foundation. SPTO and the Tourism Authority of Kiribati (TAK) received funding under the initiative.
- **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Launch the Asia-Pacific Countries with special needs Development Report**  
The report highlighted tourism as a promising sector to support Pacific SIDS recovery. As such, SPTO made a presentation and participated in a Q&A session.
- **Development of the 2050 Blue Pacific Drivers of Change**  
As a CROP agency and in support of the development of the 2050 Strategy, SPTO coordinated information sharing amongst national tourism offices to enable their participation in national consultations coordinated by PIFS.
- **Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) Webinar: Jointly Addressing the Challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Tourism Industry of OACPS members**  
Organized in the context of World Tourism Day, the webinar included a video message from SPTO which was well received by participants.
- **SPTO Development Partner Virtual Round Table Meeting**  
Focused on the presentation of the summary of the SPTO NTO Needs Assessment to gauge opportunities for development partners to support regional tourism initiatives.

### Key Strategic Partnerships and Donor Opportunities

As a result of the COVID-19 responses and advocacy initiatives listed above, key strategic partnerships were established with the following:

- **NZMFAT (Phase 1 Funding Support)**  
To strengthen SPTO's capability and digital capacity.
- **Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) Phase IV**  
To assist private sector recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.
- **Trade, Investment and Tourism Promotion Project (TTPP)**  
To aid recovery efforts in the Korean market through SPTO's Korean market representative and which will be implemented throughout 2021.
- **PARIS 21 Phase 2 Support**  
To help develop the Pacific Tourism Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework and Statistics Strategy.
- **UNDP & UNCDF Micro Credentials Project**  
To upskill unemployed tourism workers affected by COVID-19.
- **US Economic Recovery Project Grant**  
To facilitate COVID-19 economic recovery through practical business toolkits for SMEs.

If 2020 has taught us anything it is that we need to be able to adapt to change. In that regard, innovation and collaboration is vital and cannot be emphasized enough as we prepare for reactivation and recovery, post COVID-19. SPTO remains committed to steering regional tourism recovery efforts through strategic partnerships that are both well informed and all-encompassing. We are a resilient people and industry and we will rebuild stronger, smarter and more sustainably post-pandemic.



**CHRISTOPHER COCKER**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
SPTO



# Board of Directors 2020



**Halatoa Fua**  
CHAIRPERSON  
Cook Islands



**Josefa Tuamoto**  
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON  
Solomon Islands



**Christopher Cocker**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



**Gina Bunton**  
French Polynesia



**Jose Quintas**  
Timor-Leste



**Bernard Grundler**  
Nauru



**Dr. Yok Yee Chan**  
Fiji



**Adela Issachar**  
Vanuatu



**Petero Manufolau**  
Kiribati



**Avafoa Irata**  
Tuvalu



**Munipoese  
Muliakaaka**  
Wallis & Futuna



**Francis Carlos  
Domnick**  
Republic of Marshall Islands



**Pedro Edmunds  
Paoa**  
Rapa Nui



**Eric Uvovo**  
Papua New Guinea

**Minnie Tuia**  
American Samoa



**Sandrine Bellier**  
New Caledonia



**Faamatuainu Suifua**  
Samoa



**Xi Lin**  
China

**Mika Perez**  
Tokelau

**Moka Ioane**  
Niue

**Yolinda Chan**  
Fiji

## TOURISM SECTOR MEMBERS



**Robert Skews**  
Turama Pacific  
Cook Islands



**Ali Serhan**  
Warwick Le Lagon  
Resort & Spa  
Vanuatu



**Akuila Batiweti**  
Fiji Airways  
Fiji



**Brian Kirsch**  
Fiji Hotel & Tourism Association  
Fiji

**Bud Gilroy**  
Tahiti Yacht Agents  
French Polynesia



# Acronyms

|                 |                                                      |                |                                                                        |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ADRA</b>     | Adventist Development and Relief Agency              | <b>PARIS21</b> | Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century          |
| <b>ADB</b>      | Asian Development Bank                               | <b>PWFI</b>    | Plastic Waste Free Islands                                             |
| <b>APTC</b>     | Australia Pacific Training Coalition                 | <b>PWC</b>     | PricewaterhouseCoopers                                                 |
| <b>COVID-19</b> | Coronavirus Disease 2019                             | <b>PSDI</b>    | Private Sector Development Initiative                                  |
| <b>CROP</b>     | Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific     | <b>RSOAP</b>   | Regional Support for Asia and the Pacific                              |
| <b>FEMM</b>     | Forum Economic Ministers Meeting                     | <b>RTRC</b>    | Regional Tourism Resource Centre                                       |
| <b>GIFT</b>     | Griffith Institute for Tourism                       | <b>ROK</b>     | Republic of Korea                                                      |
| <b>GDP</b>      | Gross domestic product                               | <b>SDGs</b>    | Sustainable Development Goals                                          |
| <b>JEE</b>      | Job Evaluation Exercise                              | <b>SMEs</b>    | Small and Medium Enterprises                                           |
| <b>LGBTQI</b>   | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex       | <b>SIDS</b>    | Small Island Developing States                                         |
| <b>MCT</b>      | Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China             | <b>SIS</b>     | Small Island States                                                    |
| <b>NTO</b>      | National Tourism Office                              | <b>SPREP</b>   | Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme              |
| <b>NZMFAT</b>   | New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade    | <b>SPSN</b>    | South Pacific Sailing Network                                          |
| <b>OACPS</b>    | Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States | <b>SPTO</b>    | Pacific Tourism Organisation                                           |
| <b>PIC</b>      | Pacific Island Center                                | <b>TAK</b>     | Tourism Authority of Kiribati                                          |
| <b>PICs</b>     | Pacific Island Countries                             | <b>TTPP</b>    | Trade, Investment and Tourism Promotion Project                        |
| <b>PIFS</b>     | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat                    | <b>TF</b>      | Travel Foundation                                                      |
| <b>POLP</b>     | Pacific Ocean Litter Project                         | <b>UN</b>      | United Nations                                                         |
| <b>PSTLS</b>    | Pacific Sustainable Tourism Leadership Summit        | <b>UNCDF</b>   | United Nations Capital Development Fund                                |
| <b>PSTPF</b>    | Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework         | <b>UNDP</b>    | United Nations Development Programme                                   |
| <b>PTSS</b>     | Pacific Tourism Statistics Strategy                  | <b>UNESCAP</b> | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| <b>PTWAI</b>    | Pacific Tourism Waste Action Initiative              | <b>US</b>      | United States                                                          |
| <b>PT&amp;I</b> | Pacific Trade & Invest                               |                |                                                                        |



## Executive Office

The Executive Office (EO) is responsible for the overall strategic leadership and management of SPTO's programmes and activities. In 2020, the division continued its support of the sustainable development of the Pacific Tourism industry by securing new partnerships and strengthening existing ones and undertaking advocacy efforts at both the regional and national levels. Moreover, the EO has also driven the strategic vision of SPTO, particularly in light of the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.



## MAJOR DIVISIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020

### Outcome: Enhanced strategic leadership and management

#### SPTO COVID-19 Crisis Management and Response

The Executive division led the revision of the divisional 2020 AWP and budgets; to refocus on COVID-19 regional recovery efforts. Information from the SPTO private sector and NTOs proved very useful in this regard, along with valuable input and support from relevant Board Sub-Committees. Information from the SPTO COVID-19 Recovery Plan and SPTO NZMFAT funded Scenario and Response Recovery Reports played a critical role in assisting SPTO in strategizing regional recovery efforts.

Effective from 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 the SPTO Office in Suva closed with all staff working remotely in response to government measures. The Executive Division provided special COVID-19 updates for members which included travel restrictions for member countries and relevant news and information (i.e. supplementary budgets, recovery efforts, etc.). This service was well received but discontinued in early May as countries began to refocus on recovery efforts. In the week beginning 25<sup>th</sup> May, staff began working in the office on a rotational basis; with at least one representative from each division on any given day. All SPTO staff resumed normal duties and hours as of 29<sup>th</sup> June.

In early May, SPTO launched the *"Pacific Tourism: COVID19 Impact and Recovery Report"*. The report was contracted by New

Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZMFAT), who worked with SPTO to undertake the assessment. The report outlined initial impacts and emerging responses across the Pacific. The objective of this analysis was to inform thinking and to highlight future themes around Pacific regional cooperation for tourism's recovery from COVID-19. The report was fully funded by NZMFAT for the benefit of SPTO and its members.

Moreover, SPTO launched the *"SPTO COVID-19 Recovery Strategy"*, which was developed to guide and support the COVID-19 recovery efforts of SPTO and its members. The strategy provided an overview of the global situation and expected future trends, whilst also addressing the Pacific's strengths and opportunities, overall risks, immediate needs and recovery options.

In June and September, SPTO convened virtual round tables for key development partners, to present and discuss the *Pacific Tourism: Scenario Development and Recovery Pathways Report* and the summary of the SPTO NTO Needs Assessment respectively. As a result of these efforts, SPTO was able to raise awareness amongst donors and development partners, on the organisation's role as the mandated regional agency responsible for sustainable tourism development. Moreover, these engagements facilitated initial discussions on funding opportunities which led to COVID-19 recovery projects as follows:

- **UNDP & UNCDF Micro Credentials Project**

Launched in July the project offered online up-skilling opportunities to tourism workers impacted by COVID-19, through a series of micro-credential

courses offered by APTC. SPTO implemented the project's advocacy activities, resulting in close to 2000 expressions of interest for the project.

- **NZMFAT Phase 1**

Signed in October, phase 1 funding targeted SPTO organisational development and COVID tourism recovery programmes including an online tourism job vacancy portal.

- **Trade, Investment and Tourism Promotion Project (TTPP)**

A subsidiary arrangement under the ROK-PIF Cooperation Fund, the ROK – Pacific COVID19 Impact Recovery Plan for tourism focuses on recovery efforts in the Korean market through SPTO's Korean market representative and will be implemented throughout 2021.

- **US Economic Recovery Project Grant**

Under the SPTO- Travel Foundation joint proposal, COVID-19 economic recovery will be provided to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu through practical business toolkits for SMEs to help them connect to international markets.

### Organisation restructure and change management

In line with the Board approved organisation restructure the division led the implementation of the restructure including the recruitment of the new Marketing Manager and Digital Marketing Officer. Moreover, in close consultation with the selected consultant and the SPTO Finance Sub-Committee the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) 2020 was successfully completed and endorsed by the Board at the October 2020 Board

of Directors meeting. At the operational level, the Executive division continued to drive change management mechanisms so as to ensure a smooth transition of duties under the new structure, digital transformation of SPTO and an effective pivot to the overarching theme of sustainable tourism development in the region.

### Outcome: Strengthened governance and reporting

As a result of the pandemic the division led the preparations for SPTO's first virtual Board meeting which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> October. It was SPTO's first virtual meeting and it was well coordinated with good participation from SPTO's membership. Key outcomes included:

- Election of the Chair and Deputy Chair
- Endorsement of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Leadership Summit (PSTLS)
- Launch of the PARIS 21 & SPTO Pacific Tourism Statistics Assessment
- Approval of the 2021 AWP and budget
- Approval of the JEE 2020 and corresponding recommendations
- Endorsement of the HR Policy Review 2020

Furthermore, reporting and monitoring of the organisations performance was ensured via the following reporting mechanisms:

- CEO monthly updates to the Board
- Chairman's monthly Board Bulletins
- Quarterly Divisional Reports
- Divisional Annual Work Plans



## Outcome: Increased advocacy and engagement

On 11<sup>th</sup> March, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, by the end of the month Fiji imposed travel bans and social gathering restrictions. Many national, regional, and international events planned for 2020 were either cancelled or deferred. This presented a new challenge and opportunity for the division to fulfil its advocacy role on behalf of the Pacific tourism sector in a virtual capacity. In comparison to in-person attendance and participation at such events, the Executive division coordinated digital strategies to effectively provide the organisation with valuable opportunities to network with like-minded and potential partners, profile SPTO and its work, and provide input on issues of relevance to Pacific tourism. These forums strengthen and build on existing collaborative partnerships for the benefit of diversifying SPTO's funding sources and membership base.

The SPTO Executive division participated in a number of virtual and hybrid meetings, some of which are noted below:

### Regional

- CROP Heads Meeting
- Forum PACP Trade Ministers Meeting
- Forum Trade Ministers Meeting
- CROP Heads COVID-19 Weekly Briefings
- Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM)
- SPC 50<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA50)
- Regional Conference and Policy

Dialogue on Blue Economy, Ocean Tourism and Sustainable Blue Financing (ADB Institute)

- SPTO Pacific Tourism Recovery Round Table (Presentation of the Pacific Tourism: Scenario Development and Recovery Pathways Report)
- SPTO Development Partner Round Table (Presentation of the summary of the SPTO NTO Needs Assessment)
- United Nations & SPTO Pacific Tourism Recovery Round Table II – Restarting Sustainable Tourism in the Pacific

### International

- United Nations Pacific Unite Virtual Concert
- Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) Webinar – Jointly Addressing the Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Industry of the members of the OACPs

### Highlights

#### UN Pacific Unite Virtual Concert

SPTO had the privilege of partnering with the United Nations and other project partners to deliver the Pacific Unite Virtual Concert, which was screened both regionally and internationally on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Featuring artists from throughout the Pacific region, the event attracted attention and support from global figures like HRH Prince of Wales, whom officially opened the concert. In partnership with Travel Foundation (SPTO's NGO tourism partner), SPTO produced a 30 second Always Pacific campaign to promote Pacific Tourism in the virtual concert.



- **UN & SPTO Roundtable - Restarting sustainable tourism in the Pacific**

Co-hosted by the UN in the Pacific and SPTO, the meeting was conducted in person and virtually on 15<sup>th</sup> December in Nadi, Fiji. The objective of the round table was twofold:

1. To seek agreement on the needs and priority areas to restart safe and sustainable tourism in three Pacific countries through sharing of experiences and good practices globally and regionally.
2. To identify potential collaboration and partnerships to coordinate future efforts to transform tourism, including in policy development and resource mobilisation.

The meeting provided an important opportunity for SPTO to raise

awareness on the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Leadership Summit (PSTLS) and was a good platform for engaging with the private sector, civil society organisations and other key stakeholders.

**Outcome: Increased key partnerships**

The development and strengthening of relationships with key partners, donors and stakeholders is a priority for the division, as it facilitates the achievement of SPTO's mandate and goals, particularly in relation to support for projects and activities for the benefit of members. In 2020, some of these partnerships and opportunities included:

- New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZMFAT)



- Asian Development Bank - Pacific Sub Regional Office (ADB)
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea
- Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China (MCT)
- United States Embassy in Fiji
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)
- New Zealand Maori Tourism
- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations Capital Development Fund
- PARIS 21

### Highlights

- **New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZMFAT) Phase 1**  
A funding arrangement to support recovery efforts aimed at sustainable tourism development and digital marketing in the Pacific was signed by SPTO and NZMFAT in November 2020. The agreement will include support for SPTO capability development, COVID-19 recovery, digitalization of Pacific tourism, development of climate resilient and sustainable tourism and sector insights until June 2021. In the long term this support will enable SPTO to solidify its role as a robust and effective CROP agency, supporting sustainable tourism development and digital marketing in the Pacific. Phase 2 of NZMFAT support is dependent on SPTO's successful completion of phase 1 and the submission of a business case for phase 2. SPTO is anticipating phase 2 implementation from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2021.
- **Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) IV**  
As a result of ongoing lobbying by

SPTO for a regional tourism project, PSDI IV will focus on tourism, with particular emphasis on the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. Funded by the ADB and the governments of Australia and New Zealand, the Tourism Work plan will focus on the following key work streams:

- evidence-based tourism planning,
- crisis management and building resilience
- financing sustainable tourism
- enabling private sector-led tourism

### MOUs

- Pacific Island Center (PIC) Tokyo & SPTO
- Travel Foundation & SPTO
- Haiyi Institute & SPTO

### Outcome: Ongoing public relations and corporate communications

The division led the public relations and corporate communications functions of the organisation to ensure coverage and understanding of the severity of the impacts of COVID-19 on Pacific Tourism and to raise awareness on the work undertaken by SPTO to aid regional recovery efforts. SPTO's work and key achievements throughout the year were communicated to members, partners and key stakeholders by way of the following:

- 19 Press Releases
- 2 Press Conferences
- Interviews conducted by the CEO on behalf of SPTO:
  - 4 Print
  - 4 Online
  - 8 Television
  - 8 Radio
- 12 Public Relations Events attended by the CEO on behalf of SPTO



# Marketing Division

The Marketing division is responsible for promoting the Pacific region as a preferred tourism destination. The core marketing activities of the division include marketing planning, brand management, trade show coordination, digital marketing, cruise sector marketing and programme management. The division also manages SPTO's private sector membership and the South Pacific Specialist Programme.



The division works closely with creative agencies, development partners, and key stakeholders to achieve the following:

- Establishing planning systems that sufficiently cater to the marketing needs of all SPTO member countries.
- Establishing a strong link between the Pacific and key long haul, short haul and emerging markets.
- Creating awareness of Pacific niche market products.
- Managing the South Pacific Specialist Training Programme.
- Promoting member countries through Digital Marketing.
- Managing the Private Sector Membership programme.

## MAJOR DIVISIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020

### Outcome: Strengthened existing strategic partnerships and establishment of new opportunities

The division cultivated a number of key relationships to ensure the successful achievement of outcomes for various projects. Some of these partnerships included:

- New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- Pacific Trade & Invest (PT&I) China
- Pacific Islands Centre (PIC) Tokyo
- United Nations Capital Development Fund
- Australia Pacific Training Coalition

### Outcome: Ongoing presence and awareness in key long haul and emerging markets

COVID-19 disrupted planned marketing activities for long haul markets. However, regional news about how Pacific Island Countries (PICs) dealt with the pandemic and any development relating to tourism were frequently shared on social media, which reaches SPTO's target audiences including long haul markets. Prior to COVID-19 being declared a pandemic in March, the division was able to fulfil some activities for long haul markets.

#### China:

- SPTO participated in the China International Tourism Industry Expo (CITIE) 2020 through their China based representative at Welcome China. Member countries that were represented at the event included Fiji and Samoa.
- SPTO participated in the Virtual PATA Travel Mart 2020 and Sichuan International Travel Expo (SITE) through their China based representative at Welcome China. The event attracted buyers and sellers from around 40 international destinations and included a total of 150 buyers from China, India, Australia, USA, Latin America, Europe, and the Pacific. PICs that participated in the virtual event included Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati.

#### Korea:

Further to the Trade and Tourism Promotion Project (TTPP) which was implemented throughout 2020, MOFA in collaboration with PIFS, developed a subsidiary arrangement under TTPP.

The initiative aimed at mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 in the sectors of tourism and trade. SPTO focused funding support on recovery efforts in the Korean market, conducted by its market representative, Daisy Park. The approved workplan under this project will continue to be implemented in 2021. Key activities implemented to date include:

- SPTO Korea successfully developed the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Products website: [visit.southpacificislands.kr](http://visit.southpacificislands.kr). SPTO continues to provide content with an aim to feature at least 20 products for each region of the Pacific (i.e. Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia).
- SPTO Korea completed the comprehensive *Pacific Guidebook* with 2000 printed copies. An extensive awareness campaign took place which included a media release, an e-book sharing event and banner advertising.
- In December, SPTO Korea launched the "Islands, Revisited in Art", a two-week exhibition seeking to connect Korea and the Pacific through art. The event aimed to target potential travellers to the Pacific, influences, travel agents, travel influencers, and media.

#### Japan:

- SPTO assisted the Pacific Islands Centre in Tokyo with preparations for two events. Images and visitor arrivals data were provided for the Tourism Expo in Okinawa, and a promotional video was sent to assist the PIC in Tokyo with the Food Expo scheduled for 2021.

#### USA and Europe:

- In February 2020, SPTO supported the Meet the Pacific USA & Europe events with a financial contribution of FJD \$10,000 and provided training for 50 travel agents (retailers and wholesalers) in Los Angeles, USA and the following European cities: Rome, Italy, and Barcelona. Meet the Pacific Milan was cancelled due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Italy.

#### Outcome: Development of Niche Market products

##### Cruising and Yachting:

- With global tourism at a standstill due to COVID-19, SPTO's work in this area was greatly impacted. However, the Marketing division conducted and participated in meetings to explore options surrounding the promotion of cruising and yachting expeditions with the South Pacific Sailing Network (SPSN).

##### 'Ours Is Yours' Campaign:

- SPTO collaborated with the Travel Foundation to develop the #AlwaysPacific campaign, in support of COVID-19 recovery efforts. The initiative is complementary to SPTO's #OursIsYours campaign and focuses on:
  - Always offering products and experiences based on the uniqueness of our islands and communities.
  - Always striving to be better, with new knowledge, standards and training.
  - Always involving our diverse communities in our shared future.



### **Outcome: Maintaining the Pacific's presence in short haul markets**

Marketing efforts in this area were significantly impacted by COVID-19. However, key information and promotion of destinations were conducted on SPTO's social media, targeting audiences across segments including short haul markets.

#### **NZMFAT Pacific Destination Differentiation:**

- In consultation with SPTO, NZMFAT commissioned research to inform decision making on differentiated destination marketing and development strategies. The aim was to remove overlaps and help countries develop smarter, custom built, tourism strategies and tactical marketing programmes. The research covered Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Niue, and Samoa, and focused on New Zealand and Australia as main source markets.

### **Outcome: Increased enrolment and certification in the South Pacific Specialist Training Programme**

COVID-19 had an unexpected positive impact on the programme as travel agents had more time on their hands to complete online training modules. Of the 3,076 agents who registered for the South Pacific Specialist Programme in 2020, 617 successfully completed the programme to become certified South Pacific Specialists.

### **Outcome: Increased awareness of regional tourism news**

This function was achieved through the

dissemination of the weekly Pacific Pulse Weekly e-newsletters. Throughout the course of the year the newsletter was improved upon in several ways including a transition from the Campaign Monitor platform to Mail Chimp, enhanced design and improved content. This resulted in new subscribers for each quarter:

- Q1: 407 new subscribers.
- Q2: 169 new subscribers.
- Q3: 125 new subscribers
- Q4: 32 new subscribers.

### **Outcome: Improved SPTO website**

Under NZMFAT Phase 1 funding, signed in October 2020, the division was assigned funding to revamp the SPTO website, a task which was last undertaken in 2017. The work will be completed ahead of the May 2021 Board of Directors meeting, where it will be presented for final approval and officially launched. Throughout the course of the year, the website was continuously updated with the latest regional news and information and recorded significant site visits in each quarter with the highest number recorded in the quarter 2; 19,568 visits.

### **Outcome: Active social media platforms**

- Facebook reported net likes of 21,658 with an increase from 32,971 to 54,629 this year, and the highest post reach was 35,634.
- The highest number of tweets were 113 during the fourth quarter while the highest number of mentions and tags was 16, and the highest number

of impressions was 25,500 during the first quarter.

- There was a steady increase in Instagram followers with 1,442 recorded in the first quarter and 1,573 recorded in the last quarter.
- LinkedIn, while not the most popular platform for SPTO, saw some activity this year with 12 updates, 307 post likes and 17 shares, all recorded in the second quarter. A positive outcome has been that the number of followers nearly doubled from 1,227 followers in the first quarter to 2,528 followers during the fourth quarter.
- By the fourth quarter SPTO's YouTube channel recorded 27,947 subscribers, from 19,466 in January 2020. The highest number of impressions was 1.9 million in both the third and fourth quarter, and the highest numbers of views was 564,788.

### **Outcome: Strengthening of SPTO digital capabilities and marketing**

Under NZMFAT Phase 1, the division received funding support to implement the SPTO website upgrade, referred to above, along with the following key activities:

#### **Upskilling/Unit Resourcing:**

- The vacancy for a Digital Marketing Associate was advertised in late 2020 for the purpose of securing additional assistance for the division in the implementation of activities under Phase 1. The recruitment process was finalized in December 2020 and the successful candidate will remain with the division until July 2021.

#### **Enhanced IT Equipment:**

- Aside from ICT infrastructure upgrades, to facilitate the organisation's first ever virtual Board meeting in October 2020, the division also purchased new laptops, mobile phones and camera equipment to enhance SPTO's digital capabilities.

### **Outcome: Increased visibility through effective PR and communications strategies**

SPTO coordinated COVID-19 Recovery Response webinars for SPTO members. These webinars provided insight regarding travel and tourism from around the world to SPTO members. This was especially useful during regional and international border closures as it helped NTOs and tourism sector stakeholders adopt and align their strategies while preparing for borders to reopen.

In July, SPTO launched a partnership with Travel Foundation. This included an advocacy video for the #AlwaysPacific campaign, which was launched at the UN Pacific Unite Concert. The virtual concert was broadcasted globally and featured the reigning Miss Pacific Islands.

The division worked closely with the Executive Office to deliver a total of 19 media releases, which were circulated on various SPTO platforms and via the mainstream media. The CEO also conducted around 24 media interviews with regional and international media, the majority of which were in relation to COVID-19.

A full-page background image showing a diver in silhouette swimming through a dark underwater cave. The diver is positioned on the left, moving towards a bright, rectangular opening in the cave wall on the right. The water is a deep blue, and the cave walls are rugged and textured. The light from the opening creates a strong contrast and illuminates the surrounding water and rock.

# Sustainable Tourism and Research Division

This year marks a full 12 months since the merge of the Sustainable Tourism Development and the Research and Statistics Divisions. Renamed the Sustainable Tourism and Research Division, it plays a twofold role in leading SPTO's work towards achieving sustainable tourism development in the region and providing data analysis and enabling information sharing with SPTOs membership and partners.



Given the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, the division with the approval of the Board of Directors adapted its annual work plan in acknowledgement of shifting country priorities, travel restrictions and transitioning to virtual delivery of activities. The Division's priorities for the year were:

#### **Sustainable Tourism**

- Development of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework
- Completion of hands-on community and SME sustainability projects
- Assessment of NTO Priorities
- Virtual roll-out of the Small Island States Pacific Tourism Waste Action Initiative

#### **Research**

- Timely compilation, analysis and sharing of regional tourism statistical information and research
- Refocusing of tourism research and market intelligence to incorporate impacts of the pandemic
- Development of the Pacific Tourism Statistics Strategy

## **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020**

### **Outcome: Improved stakeholder engagement in the development of sustainable tourism**

The first regional stakeholder consultation for the development of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework (PSTPF) was held in March in response to the Council of Tourism Ministers meeting of October 2019, whereby the Ministers called for a regional framework to better plan and coordinate regional sustainable tourism initiatives. Attended by representatives of 10 member countries with support from PARIS21, APTC, UNDP and NZMFAT, the workshop was SPTO's first engagement opportunity to start a focused dialogue with countries, stakeholders and partners on the development of the PSTPF which will be completed prior to the SPTO Board meeting in May, 2021.

### **Outcome: New partnerships to enhance community development and SME recovery**

SPTO partnered with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Fiji to implement an innovative project on Koro Island, which aims to develop tourism products and experiences at the community level through the promotion of green income generation activities, ecotourism potential and environmental protection initiatives. SPTO supported the Market Assessment for income generating initiatives on Koro Island. The key findings of the Market Assessment

were presented by SPTO at a project launch on Koro Island in August.

In terms of SME recovery, the division partnered with the Travel Foundation to secure grant funding support from the US Embassy in Fiji through its Economic Recovery Grant. The joint project proposal on Building Resilient Tourism Futures targeted tourism SMEs in Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu (with potential to support the wider Pacific region) through the design of a practical *Are you Ready for Recovery* Toolkit to help the region's experience and excursion focused SMEs adapt and connect successfully to US and other international tourism markets.

### **Outcome: Enhanced capacity of SPTO to plan and respond to members' priorities**

In close consultation with the Executive Office and the Interim Chairman, the division led the development of the NTO Needs Assessment, which captured the key priorities of SPTO members in relation to SPTO's key priority areas: Marketing, Research and Statistics and Sustainable Tourism.

A summary of the key findings of the Assessment was presented to key development partners and donors via a virtual roundtable in October, ahead of official Board endorsement of the Assessment during the 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October Board of Directors meeting.

The following were noted as key priorities for the division and will inform the 2021 annual work plan:

### **Research**

- Research into changing market trends, preferences and niche markets post COVID-19.

### **Statistics**

- Provision of training for NTO staff and relevant national stakeholders.
- Provision of funding and technical support for improving statistical systems.

### **Sustainable Tourism**

- Assistance with the development of an economic diversification strategy.
- Provision of training and technical support in protection, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and resources.
- Assistance with waste management challenges particularly in solid waste management and strengthening of environmental policies and legislation.
- Assistance with access to green financing and sharing of best practices across all sustainability pillars.

### **Outcome: Improved capacity of SIST to reduce plastic waste through creative solutions**

SPTO and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) joined forces through the signing of a partnership agreement to provide capacity building support to SIS members (Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, FSM and RMI) through the Joint CROP Small Island States (SIS) Attachment Programme. The programme includes a capacity building component and the innovative community training programme on plastics repurposing workshops under SPTO's Pacific Tourism Waste Action Initiative (PTWAI).

PTWAI builds on the Sustainable divisions work in 2019 that looked at plastic waste recycling in Fiji and Tuvalu. The Community led approach for the project is a key aspect which looks to incorporate traditional techniques as well as engage different segments of the community including women, persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI community.

SPTO launched the first virtual plastics repurposing training workshop in Kiribati in December following months of preparation in pivoting the training model for online delivery. The programme included pre-recorded instructional videos and live interactive sessions via zoom with all participants assembling in one location in Tarawa. The collaborative effort by SPTO and the Tourism Authority of Kiribati was a resounding success and set the tone for further trainings which will be implemented in 2021.

### **Outcome: Enhanced awareness and engagement via key meetings and partnerships**

The division provided support to regional cooperation initiatives on behalf of SPTO, through participation and contribution to the following:

- CROP Socio-Economic Assessment Taskforce
- Ocean Taskforce
- 2050 Strategy Consultations
- Pacific Resilience Taskforce
- Regional Culture Working Group

### **Highlights**

- **Inception meeting of the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP)**

Led by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), SPTO and other key regional stakeholders met to discuss the implementation of POLP, which aims to address marine litter pollution in the Pacific. Funded by the Australian government through a multilateral arrangement via SPREP, POLP is a unique opportunity for SPTO to enhance its plastic waste management activities in the region. Project funding has not been impacted by reallocations due to COVID-19 but implementation has been delayed.

- **Griffith Institute for Tourism (GIFT)**

A new partnership between SPTO and the Griffith Institute for Tourism (GIFT) was established, following discussions with SPREP on a tourism focused research project in the region. GIFT sought funding support from the Australian Government to conduct a 3-year research to identify, disseminate and help implement alternative models for tourism that are resilient and transformative for people the industry purports to benefit, natural environments in which it is embedded, and for tourists seeking experiences that revitalize. Case Studies for this research include Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Cook Islands with recommendations provided for the wider membership. Discussions are also in the pipeline for collaboration in the delivery of two virtual trainings for all countries Smart Recovery and Destination Planning.



### **Outcome: Advocacy and awareness via the Sustainable Tourism Newzbeat**

The division compiled and released its monthly newsletter as a means of raising awareness amongst members and wider stakeholders on key developments on Sustainable Tourism. Continuous improvements were made throughout the course of the year to ensure that this resource is targeted, user friendly and informative.

### **Outcome: Strengthened human resource through student engagement**

The division attracted student interns from the following universities in Q1 and Q2:

- Sonoma State University
- Central Queensland University
- The University of Melbourne
- Flinders University
- University of Western Australia
- Australia National University
- University of the South Pacific

The interns assisted with research and content for the division's monthly newsletters, planning and preparation for the Regional Statistics Validation and Sustainable Tourism Development Framework Workshops, development of communications activities, assistance with the Koro Market Assessment and planning and implementation of activities under the SIS Attachment Programme.

## **RESEARCH MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020**

### **Outcome: Enhanced support for improved tourism statistics and monitoring**

Supported by PARIS 21, APTC, UNDP and NZMFAT, the Regional Statistics Validation Workshop brought together country participants from the National Statistics Offices, NTOs and partners to discuss the findings of the Pacific Tourism Statistics Assessment. The Assessment provided a comprehensive review of key policy issues and statistical challenges of tourism in the region. In addressing these, a range of recommendations were presented and noted in the three broad areas of Governance and Coordination, Data Management Practices and Data Quality. The report was officially launched at the October 2020 Board of Directors meeting where further funding support was announced by PARIS 21 for the development of the Pacific Tourism Statistics Strategy, which will be presented to the SPTO Board Meeting in May 2021.

### **Outcome: Informed decision making through the availability of quality data and information**

- Quarterly visitor arrival reports were produced throughout the year for Q4 2019 through to Q3 2020. These reports capture visitor arrival data from member countries to track tourism's performance and assist in decision making, planning and coordination.

- 2019 Annual Visitor Arrivals Report was completed with visitor arrivals data received from 13 of the 16 countries listed on the RTRC. This compilation provides an analysis of annual tourism performance whilst accounting for regional and international trends, tourism contributions to GDP, average tourist spend and length of stay.
- Monthly Market Watch publications traditionally summarized outbound travel trends, resident departure movements and market conditions for key source markets like Australia, New Zealand, North America, Europe, China and Asia. Due to the global pandemic, the publication adapted to account for COVID-19 measures to support travel and tourism. Previously only available to NTOs and premium private sector members, the publication was made publicly available in August.

### **Outcome: Strengthened data collection and analysis via regional partnerships**

#### **Training Attachment Support**

The division provided hands-on training support to Tourism Authority of Kiribati (TAK) Research and Statistics Officer in February. Key areas of focus for the training included data management, UNWTO definitions and classifications, addressing data challenges and opportunities in the Pacific, improving visitor arrivals data collection processes, outbound data compilation and analysis and online research techniques.

#### **SPTO & UNWTO Regional Support for Asia and the Pacific (RSOAP)**

Following background work which began in late 2019, the research partnership between SPTO and UNWTO continued

this year with stakeholder and in-country consultations carried out by Mr. Tony Everitt, a consultant for UNWTO. The research focused on *"Sustainable Tourism Product Development in the Pacific Islands"*. SPTO also provided assistance with the review and finalisation process. The official launch of the report was delayed to 2021, due to COVID-19.

### **Outcome: Insightful planning through access to new market research and intelligence**

The RTRC is SPTO's hub of tourism market research and intelligence, which is tourism stakeholders and SPTO's key partners. In 2020 the division uploaded 252 new publications and/or reports, which was a significant increase from the 70 uploaded in 2019. This increase was in large part due to the free access to UNWTO's e-library for a few months of 2020. Further to the above, 21 new RTRC accounts were created with a total of 872 log ins compared to 477 in 2019.

### **Outcome: SPTO Regional COVID-19 Impact Snapshot**

As part of the division's new initiative recognising the impact of the pandemic on travel and the closure of international travel, a regional snapshot report was developed by the division to highlight key information on COVID-19 including economic impacts across 19 SPTO member countries for the period March-September. The publication was presented at the Board of Directors meeting in October 2020 with the intention that continued updates will be provided in the future.



# Finance and Corporate Services Division

Led by the Finance and Corporate Services Manager, the division oversees support services in the areas of accounting, human resources, information and communication technology and administration. The division aims to provide accurate and timely information for effective decision making and deliver high standard corporate services.



## MAJOR DIVISIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020

### Outcome: Robust financial services

Timely and accurate monthly financial reports were developed to monitor SPTO finances at both the divisional and organisational level. This information was consolidated into quarterly reports which were shared with the SPTO Board of Directors.

2020 was a challenging year for SPTO, as the division undertook various risk management approaches to overcome the organisation's financial situation. A five-year budget scenario and cash flow forecast for 2020 were developed and shared with the CEO and the Board Chairperson to better manage cash flow.

Further to the above, the division ensured that SPTO's accounts were maintained and independently audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to meet Fiji accounting standards. The result of the audit conducted for the 2020 financial accounts will be known by the end of April 2021. Most likely it will be an unmodified opinion.

### Outcome: Effective government membership payment support

The Finance and Corporate Services division issued SPTO's government members' membership invoices in the first quarter of 2020. By the end of the fourth quarter a total of 17 countries paid their 2020 membership fees in full, and a partial payment was received from one

member country. Frequent inquiries were made with member countries regarding membership fees as well.

Moreover, following the recommendation by the Board of Directors in the October Board meeting, the Finance and Corporate division developed and communicated repayment plans to countries with membership debts.

### Outcome: Efficient administrative and personnel support

Processing of wages and payments, ongoing budget monitoring, and preparation of management allowances are other key services undertaken by the division. In accordance with the policies and procedures of Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS) and Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), the 12 months lodgements and payments of Pay As You Earn Tax (PAYE), Contractual Provisional Tax (PT) and FNPF deductions were made on a timely basis.

The division also successfully implemented processes and tools to help staff work remotely. In collaboration with SPTO's bank, the division shifted to an online payment platform. The division also implemented the Video Conferencing System and a separate Dedicated Internet Line to help divisions carry out virtual meetings and workshops.

In addition, the division provided relevant support for the following recruitment:

- Marketing Manager
- Digital Marketing Officer
- Executive Office Assistant (Part-Time)

- Digital Marketing Associate (Part-Time)
- Finance and Administration Officer (Part-Time)
- Project Coordinator (Part-Time)
- Republic of Korea (ROK) and PIFS COVID-19 Recovery Project
- Tourism and Trade Promotion Project
- United Nations Development Programme & United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) Micro-Credentials Project for the Tourism Sector

This support included input to job descriptions, vacancy advertisements, screening, interviewing and final recruitment mechanisms. Other than the above mentioned positions, similar support was provided to staff contract renewals, contracts with service providers, internships and work attachments. Staff welfare, via medical insurance, term life policies, leave entitlements and other benefits were also maintained by the division.

This included the development of financial reports, tender processes, purchasing and coordination of staff trainings as follows:

- Performance Management System
- Project Management Training
- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Training

### **Outcome: Strengthened administrative support to other divisions**

Administrative support was provided to the Executive Office for the organisation of SPTO's first ever virtual Board meeting, held on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> October, and the implementation of recommendations from the Job Evaluation Exercise 2020. The division also implemented an online voting system for the election of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

Furthermore, the division also provided financial and administrative advice and support to other divisions in relation to donor funded projects, some of which include:

- NZ MFAT Phase 1 Project
- US Embassy in Fiji Economic Resilience Grant Program
- Joint CROP Small Island States (SIS) Attachment Programme





**The 2020 Audit Report will be inserted and  
shared prior to the May Board meeting.**





## PACIFIC TOURISM ORGANISATION

Level 3, FNPF Place,  
343-359 Victoria Parade  
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji.  
T | +679 330 4177  
F | +679 330 1995  
E | [tourism@spto.org](mailto:tourism@spto.org)  
W | [www.spto.org](http://www.spto.org)



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