



5th FRANCE-OCEANIA SUMMIT

Statement by the President of French Polynesia H.E. Mr. Edouard FRITCH

(Speech delivered on July 18, 2021, 10pm Papeete time, *this is a courtesy translation*
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Session 3: Covid-19 economic recovery, connectivity and infrastructure

His Excellency, the President of the French Republic,
Dear Prime minister of Tuvalu and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum,
Dear fellow Leaders of the Pacific Islands countries and territories,
Dear Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,
Directors General of regional organizations,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to warmly thank President Macron and the Chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum, Mr. Kausea Natano, for bringing us together today to discuss topics that are crucial for our people and their future.

Covid-19 has shaken the world and Oceania. Our Oceanian economies have globally lost 6% growth during 2020. French Polynesia has lost nearly 10% of its GDP.

This epidemic has forced us to close our borders and confine our populations to their homes in order to avoid a health and human catastrophe. This has put supply chains and people's mobility in trouble. Our businesses, jobs and families have been weakened by this crisis, which is in addition to the crisis related to climate change, which is already hitting our Pacific Region hard. We all share these observations.

In French Polynesia, we began to react, as early as March 2020. During the lockdown, we have learned again to be resilient with our own resources. Families started farming the land and we saw many vegetable gardens blooming.

The French Polynesian government has deployed its own means to safeguard the economy and preserve jobs. In one year, our government has spent, in addition to its annual budget, an additional EUR 295 million (USD 350 million) to directly support jobs at risk and families in difficulty. Quickly, the French State massively supported the French Polynesian economic fabric by injecting EUR 630 million (USD 750 million). Thus, in one year, the government of French Polynesia and the French State injected approximately EUR 1 billion (USD 1.2 billion), a volume equivalent to one year of French Polynesia budget. That's huge! But it was the price



to pay to preserve our families, all our tools of production, and therefore to preserve social peace. In the coming weeks, the French State should grant us a new guaranteed loan of 302 million euros (360 million US dollars). Part of this sum will be intended to save our indispensable airline Air Tahiti Nui, which has been severely weakened, like those of our brothers and sisters in the Pacific by the various border closures.

I thank the President of the French Republic for the great expression of solidarity that France has had towards its autonomous territories, through the significant financial support, through the assistance of several medical teams from France in times of hospital saturation and through the free supply of all our vaccines.

We have made the choice to live with the virus. We have upheld our values of respect and protection for our loved ones, our elderly and our frail people. This epidemic has revived our spirit of solidarity, sharing and resilience.

This health crisis has also highlighted the importance of connectivity between our islands and the outside world. Fortunately, 10 years ago we invested in the first Tahiti-Hawaii submarine cable, Honotua. Over the past five years, we have accelerated these investments with three new cables, the Manatua international Tahiti-Samoa cable and two domestic ocean cables that serve our outer islands. In total, nearly EUR 170 million (USD 200 million) have been invested. Here too, the subsidies granted by the French State have made it easier for us to make these very heavy investments for a small country like ours. I also thank and commend the fruitful cooperation between New Zealand, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Niue in the realization of Manatua. This cable is the very epitome of the vision shared by Polynesian and Pacific Leaders for a connected Pacific region.

To conclude my remarks, dear friends, I would just like to share three convictions:

1. The first is that "nothing will never be the same again". This health crisis forces us to accelerate our environmental, energy, economic and human transitions. These transitions must be built on our own resources, our cultures and our resilience know-how.
2. The second is that in the face of a major crisis, be it health or climate or economic, our island countries need to be supported by the major powers.
3. The third is that their Indo-Pacific strategy should encourage France and the European Union to cooperate in a useful way with small Pacific Islands States and Territories by responding to their needs for technological solutions adapted to the size of their islands in terms of drinking water production or waste treatment or renewable energy production or protection of their populations in the event of climatic and health threats.

Before concluding, I would also like to thank Australia and its Prime Minister, Mr. Scott MORRISON, and President Macron for the opening of the first Australian Consulate General in



French Polynesia since May 2021. It is a strong gesture of your friendship with our country and community and a recognition of our regional commitment.

In conclusion, I would like to warmly thank President Macron and his government for their unwavering support. I would also have the pleasure of welcoming you to French Polynesia next week for your first visit to our islands. Mr. President, the support of the European Union and the major powers in the region is crucial for us and for our brothers in the Pacific so as to confront the unprecedented crisis we are experiencing and to continue to build a multilateral, prosperous and secure world for all, respecting the interests and priorities of our blue Pacific continent.

Thank you for your attention, Mr. President.

Thank you for your attention my dear Brothers and Sisters of the Pacific.
