For thousands of years, the Pacific coasts and oceans have supported island communities by providing food, shelters and materials for peoples’ everyday lives and as a result, the majority of people (around 80%) in Pacific countries live along the coast.

The importance of coasts and oceans for people is highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goal 14: ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.’ In June 2017, the Government of Fiji and Sweden will co-host a United Nations conference in New York to support the implementation of the SDG 14. In preparation for this ‘Oceans Conference’, the Government of Fiji organized a meeting in Suva from 15 to 17 March for Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) to, amongst other issues, coordinate their position on the draft of the “Call for Action” that will be the outcome from the Ocean Conference.

The preparatory meeting was attended by high-level dignitaries, such as the President of Nauru and the Prime Ministers of the Cook Islands, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, as well as representatives from regional organizations. The meeting identified necessary partnerships and possible voluntary commitments by the PSIDS that would help progress towards achieving the seven SDG14 targets. The voluntary commitments included recognizing the role of coastal ecosystem such as mangroves, sea-grass beds and tidal-flats in storing carbon (‘blue carbon ecosystems’) and the need to conserve and restore, where necessary, such ecosystems. There was also a call encouraging PSIDS to accede to the Ramsar Convention and to designate key coastal wetlands as Ramsar Sites.

Fiji currently has one Ramsar Site and is in the process of designating two coastal wetlands as Ramsar Sites. One of these is the 1,300 square kilometres Qoliqoli Cokovata that forms part of Cakaulevu (the ‘Great Sea Reef’) which is the third largest barrier coral reef in the world and the designation is being supported by WWF. The other site is the area of mangroves at Nasoata (close to the Rewa River Delta) which is a representative example of this type ecosystem in the biogeographic region.