

Exploring this Sea of Islands

KIMIKIMI'ANGA MATATIO NO ROTO I TO TATOU PA ENUA
EXPLORER 'NOTRE MER D'ÎLES'

THE 5TH PACIFIC ISLANDS UNIVERSITIES RESEARCH NETWORK CONFERENCE
4-6 July 2023, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

5TH PIURN CONFERENCE REPORT

+250
ATTENDEES

30 UNIVERSITIES
FROM THE
PACIFIC

170
PRESENTATIONS
36 SESSIONS



The Pacific Islands Universities Regional Network (PIURN - originally named Pacific Islands Universities Research Network) held its 5th conference on 4, 5 and 6 July 2023 at The University of the South Pacific (USP) Cook Islands Campus. The conference was jointly organized with Te Puna Vai Marama. The 5th PIURN Conference also marked the 10-year anniversary of the network, and was attended by PIURN member universities, as well as universities and research institutes from the region (Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii).

The work of Epeli Hau'ofa, one of the most revered academics in the Pacific, provided the conference theme, 'Exploring this Sea of Islands'. During the three days of the conference, 36 sessions were organized on a range of topics: Oceania Worldviews, Status of Women, Climate Risks and Transformations, Health Challenges, Education in the Pacific.... The conference also highlighted scientific and academic cooperation in the region and presented research collaborative projects.

The 5th PIURN Conference was funded through registration fees, and external partners, projects and other **generous sponsors**.



HIGHLIGHTS

The organizing team worked on securing **scholarships for students and early career researchers from PIURN Member Universities**, so they could have the opportunity to present their research findings in front of an academic audience from the region. 29 awardees travelled to the conference.



The opening ceremony took place on Tuesday, July 4th. Guests of honour were the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Mr. Mark Brown, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Mr. Henry Puna, the King's Representative, Sir Tom Marsters, the PIURN co-chairs, Professor Catherine Ris, President of UNC and Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor and President of USP, as well as the keynote speaker, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Samoa (NUS), Associate Professor Tuifuisaá Patila Malua Amosa. It was hosted by the Director of USP's Cook Islands Campus, Dr Debi Futter-Puati. The guests were welcomed with a traditional Turou. After speeches by the guests of honor and hymns sung by Api'i Avarua schoolchildren, the ceremony concluded with an artistic performance by the Akirata Dance Group.



The Artist in Residence Michael Tavioni presented "**Te Mana o Te Vaka**", exploring the importance of the vaka, or canoe, as a central element in Polynesian culture. Throughout the conference, a vaka was on display, and delegates were invited to talk to the sculptors about their work and the representation of the designs.

A **plenary session, celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the network**, was held on Tuesday, July 4th, with high-level guest speakers, on the theme "Empowering Pacific Islands' universities: PIURN, an asset for the South Pacific region". This session unveiled the new name of the network: Pacific Islands Universities Regional Network as well as the new vision and mission for PIURN. The speakers emphasized the importance of collaboration to foster universities' capacity building, also with universities in the region

The 5th PIURN Conference organized a "**Festschrift for the late Cook Islands academic Dr. Marjorie Crocombe**" to celebrate her contribution to the region, and was attended by Cook Islands Prime Minister Mr. Mark Brown, Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Mr. Henry Puna, and many Cook Islanders and international academics.



**SAVE THE DATE :
NEXT PIURN CONFERENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN 2025**

