

Pacific leaders call for Antarctic krill protection at the 55th Pacific Islands Forum

The Forum's final communiqué linked the future of migratory humpback whales, essential to Pacific tourism-based livelihoods, to decisions made in the Southern Ocean

Koror, Republic of Palau, 9 September 2026 - Pacific leaders have called for further attention to the protection of Antarctic krill and the wider marine ecosystem in the final declaration of the 55th Pacific Islands Forum, placing the connection between the Pacific and Southern Ocean on the region's collective diplomatic agenda.

The language, adopted after leaders met in Koror from 31 August to 3 September, followed a concern about migratory humpback whales raised by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, H.E. Lord Fakafanua. These whales breed and give birth in Pacific waters, but depend on Antarctic feeding grounds during a key part of their life cycle.

"Leaders acknowledged the Kingdom of Tonga's concern regarding the protection of migratory humpback whales, noting their ecological connection between the Pacific and Southern Ocean. Leaders recognised that their protection requires attention across migratory corridors, including to the impacts of climate change and called for further attention on the protection of Antarctic krill and the wider marine ecosystem," stated the final communiqué of the Forum.

The communiqué does not prescribe specific policy measures, but gives Pacific governments a shared basis to engage more actively in Antarctic marine governance, where decisions affecting migratory species are made by the 27 members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). Pacific Island countries do not have a seat in those negotiations.

TONGA BRINGS ANTARCTIC PROTECTION INTO PACIFIC DIPLOMACY

During the Forum, Tonga's Prime Minister, Lord Fakafanua, argued that Tonga can protect humpback whales only while they are in its waters. Their survival also depends on access to krill in the Southern Ocean. He called for Antarctica to become a greater priority for Pacific diplomacy and the establishment of long-delayed marine protected areas in Antarctica, all steps toward putting an end to krill fishing in the Southern Ocean.

"Tonga may be far from the Antarctic negotiating table, but we are not far from the consequences of its decisions. Protecting the Southern Ocean means protecting our whales, our tourism economy and the livelihoods of our people," Lord Fakafanua wrote in an [**opinion article published by Island Times**](#), "Pacific nations have a legitimate stake in Antarctica's future. It is time our voices were heard."

A GROWING CALL FROM COUNTRIES OUTSIDE ANTARCTIC NEGOTIATIONS

Lord Fakafanua's alert and its inclusion in the Pacific Islands Forum communiqué follows calls from other countries outside CCAMLR for a greater voice in decisions about the Southern Ocean. In June, during the Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa, Kenya, Angola's Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Carmen dos Santos, **called on African leaders** to demand an end to industrial krill fishing. She linked the health of Antarctica to African food security, coastal livelihoods and economic resilience, and highlighted humpback whale migrations along the coasts of Angola, Namibia, Gabon and South Africa.

Together, interventions such as those from Tonga and Angola challenge the idea that decisions about Antarctic wildlife concern only the states that govern and exploit the Southern Ocean. They claim the right to participate in the governance of the Southern Ocean for countries connected to Antarctica through whale migrations, ocean circulation, climate regulation and coastal economies.

PRESSURE AHEAD OF THE OCTOBER NEGOTIATIONS

The Pacific Islands Forum's statement comes after the Antarctic krill fishery reached its annual 620,000-metric-tonne management threshold early for the second consecutive year. The fishery closed on 12 August 2026, months before the season traditionally ends on 30 November. The same happened for the first time in 2025.

The annual catch threshold set by CCAMLR is not, by itself, a guarantee that wildlife has enough krill in the places and at the times it needs it. CCAMLR's spatial catch limits that distributed fishing effort across four areas expired in 2024, allowing catches to become more concentrated near important feeding grounds around the Antarctic Peninsula and South Orkney Islands. Climate change and declining sea ice are also adding pressure to the same ecosystem.

The Our Antarctica campaign is urging Pacific governments, and CCAMLR Members from other regions, to carry the Forum's concern into the Commission's annual meeting in October. The campaign is calling for the establishment of long-delayed marine protected areas, including the Domain 1 Antarctic Peninsula Marine Protected Area, and reforms that put CCAMLR's conservation mandate first, as steps toward an end to industrial krill fishing in the Southern Ocean.

WHY ANTARCTIC KRILL MATTERS

- + Antarctic krill is central to the Southern Ocean food web. Whales, penguins, seals, seabirds, fish and squid depend on it.
- + Krill supports climate regulation by consuming carbon-rich phytoplankton and transporting carbon into deeper water.
- + Humpback whales that feed in Antarctica migrate to breeding grounds across the Pacific, Africa and Latin America.
- + The krill fishery supplies largely non-essential products including aquaculture feed, pet food and dietary supplements - for all of which tried and tested non-krill alternatives already exist.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- + [Pacific Islands Forum communiqué](#). The relevant language appears in paragraph 65 on page 12.
- + [Tonga's future is unfolding in Antarctic waters](#). Opinion article by Lord Fakafanua published ahead of the Forum.
- + [Protect Antarctic krill to preserve the health of Africa's coastal communities](#). Commentary by Carmen dos Santos, Angola's Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources.
- + [Antarctic krill fishery closes months early amid increasing fishing pressure](#). Background on the 2026 closure and the expiry of spatial safeguards.

Interviews with and commentary by experts and campaign spokespeople are available on demand.

PRESS RELEASE ENDS

ABOUT OUR ANTARCTICA CAMPAIGN:

The [Our Antarctica](#) campaign, launched at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice (July 2025), has united a group of ocean leaders, scientists, policymakers and public figures, including **Dr. Sylvia Earle** (renowned marine biologist), **Benedict Cumberbatch** (actor), **Sophie Hunter** (artist and activist), **Cristina Mittermeier and Paul Nicklen** (film-makers and activists), **Rashid Sumaila** (professor of oceans and fisheries economics), and other prominent defenders of the ocean.

At the heart of the campaign is the [All Eyes on Antarctica report](#) (2025), a powerful indictment of CCAMLR's failure to fulfill its mandate to protect one of the planet's last wildernesses. Endorsed by over 70 ocean leaders, scientists, policymakers and public figures, the report warns of the devastating impacts of industrial krill fishing that threaten the survival of Antarctic wildlife, including whales that migrate to the waters of Latin America, the Pacific Islands and African countries.

FURTHER CAMPAIGN INFORMATION:

- + [Read more about the campaign and watch the campaign film: Our Antarctica](#)
- + [Read more about Antarctic krill fishing: All Eyes on Antarctica: holding CCAMLR to its conservation mandate](#)
- + [The climate case for enhanced marine protection of the Southern Ocean](#)

AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL:

- + The Ocean Image Bank: <https://www.theoceanagency.org/ocean-image-bank/antarctica> (Royalty-free images; attribution required.)
- + Specific Antarctica images and B-roll available on demand.

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