



## **Opening Speech for the FALAH Workshop**

**Professor Transform Aqorau  
Vice Chancellor**

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Honiara, Solomon Islands**

Ladies and Gentlemen, delegates, distinguished guests, and colleagues,

As Vice Chancellor of the Solomon Islands National University, it is both an honour and a profound responsibility to welcome each of you to the commencement of the FALAH Workshop. Under the compelling theme: Forestry, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Health—Our Livelihoods, Our Future, we convene to address pressing issues at the very heart of our community's survival and prosperity. This gathering marks a significant moment as we delve into discussions that are critical not only to our present but to the enduring sustainability of our communities.

The challenges confronting the Pacific Islands in the realms of forestry, agriculture, fisheries, and health are exacerbated by the relentless advance of climate change. These sectors, fundamental to our economies and ways of life, are under unprecedented strain. Rising sea levels threaten our arable land, while changing weather patterns disrupt traditional farming and fishing practices that have thrived for generations. The health of our communities is directly tied to these environmental changes, as new diseases emerge, and existing health challenges intensify. Today, we stand at a crossroads, where our actions can either forge pathways to resilience and adaptation or lead us into greater vulnerability.

The discussions and outcomes of this workshop are pivotal. They have the potential to influence policy, reshape practices, and drive innovation across the islands. By fostering an interdisciplinary approach and integrating Indigenous knowledge with scientific research, we aim to develop strategies that are not only effective but also respectful of our cultural heritage and ecological limits. The success of our endeavours here could serve as a blueprint for other island communities globally, showcasing how to harmonize ecological sustainability with economic and social development. Let us proceed with a shared commitment to turning our

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challenges into stepping stones for a sustainable and prosperous future for all our communities across the Pacific Islands.

As we gather here today and tomorrow, we are united by a crucial mission—to delve into and tackle the multifaceted issues that climate change and environmental degradation are imposing on our health, agriculture, and fisheries sectors. The Solomon Islands, emblematic of the broader Pacific region, is profoundly impacted by these escalating challenges. Our local experiences mirror a global crisis where rising temperatures, increasing ocean acidity, and the frequency of extreme weather events transform from distant threats into immediate adversities that threaten our very sustenance and health.

In the realm of agriculture, these environmental changes bring about erratic weather patterns that disrupt traditional planting and harvesting schedules, leading to decreased crop yields and increased food insecurity. Our fisheries face similar threats as warmer oceans and acidifying waters compromise coral reef ecosystems, which are vital habitats for the fish stocks on which our communities depend. Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods not only devastates our physical infrastructure but also leaves lasting impacts on our agricultural and marine resources, thereby exacerbating our vulnerability to food scarcity.

Our health sector is not insulated from these impacts. The changing climate acts as a catalyst for emerging health crises, facilitating the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, which are already significant health burdens in the Pacific. Additionally, heatwaves and fluctuating weather conditions contribute to non-communicable diseases, such as respiratory problems and heat-related illnesses, straining our healthcare systems further. These evolving health challenges necessitate an urgent and adaptive response, integrating climate considerations into public health planning and resource allocation.

Thus, as we engage in discussions and collaborative efforts over the next two days, it is imperative that we focus on innovative, sustainable solutions that address these pressing issues. By drawing on a combination of traditional knowledge and modern science, we can formulate strategies that not only mitigate the adverse effects of climate change but also enhance the resilience of our communities. Let us commit to a proactive approach, where the sustainability of our islands is viewed through the lens of ecological integrity, community health, and economic viability. Our collective action now is crucial to safeguarding the future of the Solomon Islands and setting a precedent for global environmental and social stewardship.

Our program over the next two days is rich and varied. Dr. Olivier Galy and Professor JM Fosting will provide an overview of the FALAH Project, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. This project is pivotal as it integrates our collective knowledge and directs it towards sustainable solutions across our key sectors.

We will hear from Mary Tahu Paia on the vital role of mangroves in our livelihoods, which are not merely coastal defences but are integral to our food security and ecological stability.

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Patrick Miniti will enlighten us on the incorporation of sports and health into our school curriculums, an initiative that promises to enhance the well-being of our younger generations.

John Fasi's insights into family farming and the optimization of traditional practices will reconnect us with our ancestral knowledge, which has sustained our communities through the ages. Furthermore, Dr. Hugo Bugoro will address pressing health issues like malaria, which remains a significant threat under the shadow of climate change.

These presentations and discussions embody the core mission of the FALAH Project. Family farming, food, lifestyle, and health—collectively encapsulated in the acronym FALAH—address critical and interrelated issues that are increasingly affecting the Pacific region. This project seeks to shine a spotlight on these vital areas, fostering a deeper understanding of how they intersect and influence the well-being and sustainability of our communities. The workshops and seminars over the next two days will provide an invaluable platform for sharing insights, experiences, and innovative solutions aimed at addressing these pressing challenges.

During our time together, we will hear from a diverse array of experts and practitioners who will delve into various facets of family farming, nutritional practices, health issues, and sustainable living. These sessions are designed to highlight both the current state and future possibilities within these domains. For instance, presentations on traditional farming practices will reveal how ancestral wisdom can be harnessed to enhance food security and resilience in the face of climate change. Discussions on health will tackle both the prevention and management of diseases exacerbated by environmental factors, offering strategies that integrate modern healthcare with traditional knowledge.

The aim of these presentations is not only to inform but also to inspire action and collaboration. By engaging in these discussions, we collectively contribute to the body of knowledge that can drive policy changes and practical interventions across the Pacific. This workshop is an opportunity to forge new partnerships, share best practices, and develop strategies that are both innovative and culturally appropriate. Through these collaborative efforts, we can ensure that the FALAH Project continues to make a meaningful impact, improving the quality of life for communities across our region and setting a sustainable course for future generations.

This workshop is not just about discussions; it is about forging pathways that lead to actionable solutions. The challenge of global warming and heat stress on our natural and human resources demands innovative approaches and resilient strategies. It requires us to rethink how we manage our forestry, how we cultivate our lands, how we harvest our seas, and how we safeguard our health.

At the SINU, we recognise the imperative of adapting to the dynamic global landscape while preserving the rich heritage that defines the Pacific Islands. To this end, SINU is proud to spearhead the development of the Centre for Islands Futures, an initiative aimed at fostering sustainable development through an integrated approach that honours our past while embracing the future. This center is envisioned as a hub for research and innovation, focusing

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on the unique challenges and opportunities that island nations face in the context of global environmental and economic changes.

The Centre for Islands Futures places a significant emphasis on the integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific research, acknowledging that our ancestral practices hold vital insights into sustainable living. For centuries, Pacific communities have thrived by closely observing natural cycles and ecological signals, developing practices that are both sustainable and adaptive to changing environmental conditions. By bringing this Indigenous knowledge to the forefront of academic research and dialogue, SINU aims to craft resilient strategies that are not only scientifically sound but also culturally resonant.

Furthermore, the center will serve as a collaborative platform for scholars, practitioners, community leaders, and policymakers, facilitating a multidisciplinary approach to solving complex problems. This collaboration is critical as it allows for the exchange of ideas and knowledge across different fields, leading to more holistic and impactful solutions. The Centre for Islands Futures will prioritize projects that enhance local capacities, foster economic development, and promote environmental stewardship within island communities.

Through these efforts, SINU is setting a precedent for how universities can play a pivotal role in addressing the global challenges of the 21st century while staying rooted in local culture and traditions. The establishment of the Centre for Islands Futures is a testament to our commitment to creating a sustainable future that leverages the strength of traditional knowledge systems alongside modern technological and scientific advancements. By nurturing this integration, SINU not only contributes to the resilience and prosperity of the Solomon Islands but also offers valuable lessons and strategies for other island nations around the globe.

In conclusion, as we move forward with the sessions of this workshop, let us remain acutely conscious of the significance of our endeavour's. The discussions we engage in and the collaborations we foster over the next two days possess the potential to not only shape the future of the Solomon Islands but also to establish benchmarks for sustainability across the Pacific. This workshop represents a crucial opportunity to transcend traditional methodologies and to innovate in ways that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable. Let us harness this unique gathering as a platform for transformative ideas, where the collective expertise and insights of each participant contribute to a robust blueprint for our future.

The spirit of collaboration that this workshop embodies is fundamental to its success. As we exchange knowledge and share experiences, we must also commit to a unified vision—one that includes active steps towards realizing the sustainable development goals that are crucial for our survival and prosperity. Our discussions should not only reflect on current challenges but also anticipate future needs, ensuring that our strategies are resilient and adaptable to changing global and local dynamics. It is through such forward-thinking and cooperative efforts that we can hope to secure a thriving future for the next generations.

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I extend my deepest gratitude to each of you for your engagement and dedication as we undertake this journey together. Your presence here at the Solomon Islands National University is a testament to your commitment to our shared objectives. I am confident that the discussions over the next two days will be rich in insight and that the partnerships forged here will be lasting. Together, let us strive not only to envision a sustainable future but to actively construct it through our concerted efforts.

Thank you once again for your attention. Welcome to our university and to an event that promises not just to debate possibilities but to define actionable paths forward. I eagerly anticipate the innovative ideas and enduring collaborations that will emerge from this workshop.

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