

# Media release

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22 AUGUST 2023

## Statement by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, the Honourable Mark Brown on Japan's planned release of ALPS-treated water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 22 August 2023 - The Government of Japan has requested the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) begin preparations for the release of treated water from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean, with the first treated water set to be discharged on or after 24 August 2023.

Japan has reassured the region that the water has been treated through the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), a multi-nuclide removal system that removes various radioactive materials from contaminated water.

Prime Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown, notes that this issue has been of interest for Pacific Leaders for some time, and decisions from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Special Leaders Meeting held in Suva in February reaffirmed the importance placed by Pacific Leaders on ensuring international consultation, compliance with international law, and independent and verifiable scientific assessments. Pacific Leaders had also agreed to intensify political and scientific dialogue and reaffirmed the importance of science and data to guide a decision on the discharge.

The PIF Special Leaders Meeting further acknowledged the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as the international authority on nuclear safety standards and the work of the PIF Panel of Independent Experts providing independent guidance and advice to Forum Members. Leaders continued to support ongoing intensive dialogue with Japan and the IAEA.

Prime Minister Brown understood the complexities of the issue given the region's history of nuclear testing in the region by powers from beyond the region, and the ongoing legacy still faced by several Pacific Islands nations.

"This is a demanding situation for all of us, and we need to assess the science in making a decision on the discharge. For the Cook Islands, I believe that we have carefully considered the issue within the guidelines provided by Leaders in February. I have met with Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi when he visited the Cook Islands on 10 July. Director-General Grossi presented the fifth IAEA Report on the Safety Review of the ALPS-Treated Water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station with the findings that the treated water met international safety standards."

Prime Minister Brown reiterated his confidence in the IAEA as a UN-mandated agency that provides expert advice on nuclear issues and has a reputation for independence. The IAEA has also committed to establishing an elevated dialogue mechanism with the Forum and have a permanent monitoring presence at Fukushima which will alert to any safety concerns with the discharge.

"I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Forum Panel of Independent Scientific Experts and their initial advice in response to the fifth IAEA Report. They have provided us with excellent service and have enabled us to critically question and examine TEPCO plans to discharge the ALPS-treated water. Consequently, the Government of Japan has upped their engagement with our region, and I commend Japan's Prime Minister Kishida for his leadership on this matter."

Prime Minister Brown recalled the discussion by Troika Leaders on 11 August 2023 in Suva, where they discussed the issue and acknowledged the sovereignty of individual nations to take a position based on their assessment of the available science and in the best interest of their own people.

"I have taken time to consult with some Pacific Leaders, the Prime Minister of Japan, and Director-General Grossi. I have read the reports, assessed the science, and invested trust in our International Organisation that has expertise in this area. This is not a decision taken lightly, as I will never support unsafe and dangerous nuclear dumping. I believe that the discharge meets international safety standards, and I welcome the opening of the IAEA office at the TEPCO site within the Fukushima Daiichi last month, and have been assured by Prime Minister Kishida that Japan will continue to ensure that the IAEA can continue to monitor and assess activities on-site related to the water discharge, to ensure this continues to be consistent with international safety standards as set by the IAEA, on the day of the start of the discharge and thereafter."

Prime Minister Brown acknowledges that not all Pacific Leaders will have the same position and may not reach a collective position on the ALPS-treated water discharge but this is the prerogative of Leaders - to make their own assessment of the science and consequent decision.

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