

# MOANA VOICES

PACIFIC WOMEN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FISHERIES

Issue 3: 2020/21



**MERE LAKEBA, FIJI**  
**EXPLAINING THE WHY**

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MOANAVOICES aims to increase the participation of women in fisheries by raising the profile of fisheries as a potential career, as well as the profile of women already working in the sector.

Other ways to foster balance in the sector include providing support networks for women in fisheries and strengthening institutions, workplaces and conditions.

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# EXPLAINING THE WHY: MERE LAKEBA

FFA's Moana Voices series on women shaping the future of oceanic fisheries is edited, researched and produced by Lisa Williams. This interview for Moana Voices 2021 edition is with Mere Lakeba, of Fiji. Ms Lakeba was Director for Fisheries in the Fijian Ministry of Fisheries at the time of the interview, and is now Country Director, Conservation International–Fiji. The interview is published here to mark International Women's Day.

"I think the friction that can emerge around the age gap in Pacific office cultures requires clear communication on roles and demands a huge amount of respect between colleagues as people."

I began my journey with the fisheries sector in 2012, managing an aquaculture station and implementing one of our programs within the ministry. At the time, there were several young women graduates coming out of the university and

looking for work. Fisheries were basically male-dominated, and it recruited graduates who were eager to make our mark in the world. Looking back from where I am now, as Director for Fisheries, I see that many of those whom I entered the fisheries sector with have ventured to other sectors and professions.

I have been hooked by the exposure to working with communities. It certainly was not about the pay packet back then; it was purely trying to make a difference.





Talking to people, explaining to them the reasons for why and how we do things. In hindsight, I feel that this is probably the biggest gap there is in our line of work.

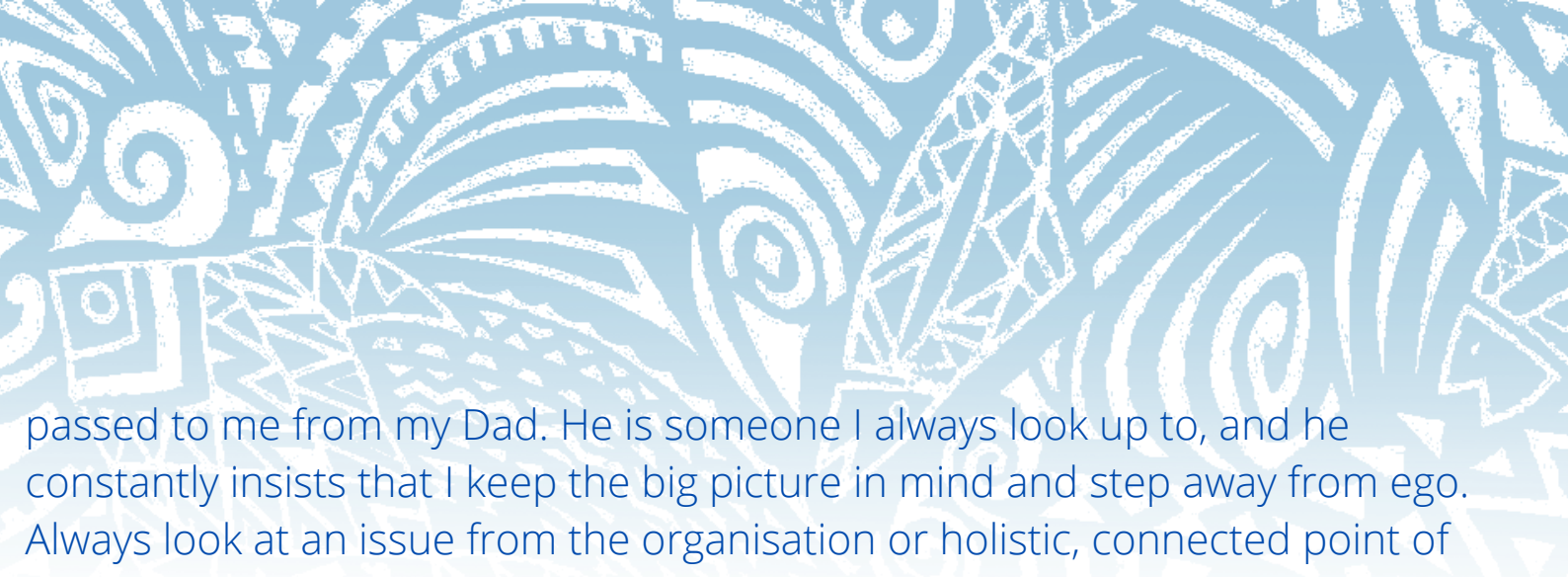
In 2012, I was more involved with control and compliance work, ensuring that our fishers were licensed, and through observation and dialogue, I noticed that they would constantly enquire as to why we were doing this, why was licensing necessary, why was government exerting mechanisms and measures over something they saw as their resources. So, I have always enjoyed that challenge of explaining the why. Why fisheries does this, who it benefits, and how the rules help with resource management. We play crucial roles of conservators and stewards of the resources. Simultaneously, those conservation and management roles are parallel with the development of the resource for livelihoods. So, always, my flagship is just to explain the why. And then that is when people begin to understand their part in the bigger picture.

Over the years, I have progressed and learned through my experiences working with communities and stakeholders across the board. I have concluded that when people understand the why of something, they are more receptive, they are more engaged. I am adamant that this is the key to any development or any work with communities.

Keep in mind when you are trying to initiate anything in fisheries resources, you are pointing at something that is innate to our people. When the questions rush at me, I try to respond knowing they are asking from this core question: "Why would I change something that my ancestors have been doing?" It is important to focus on explaining the impacts and benefits of our work, as opposed to pushing a "do this or else" point of view.

My approach has been one of listening, and inclusivity. These are two tools





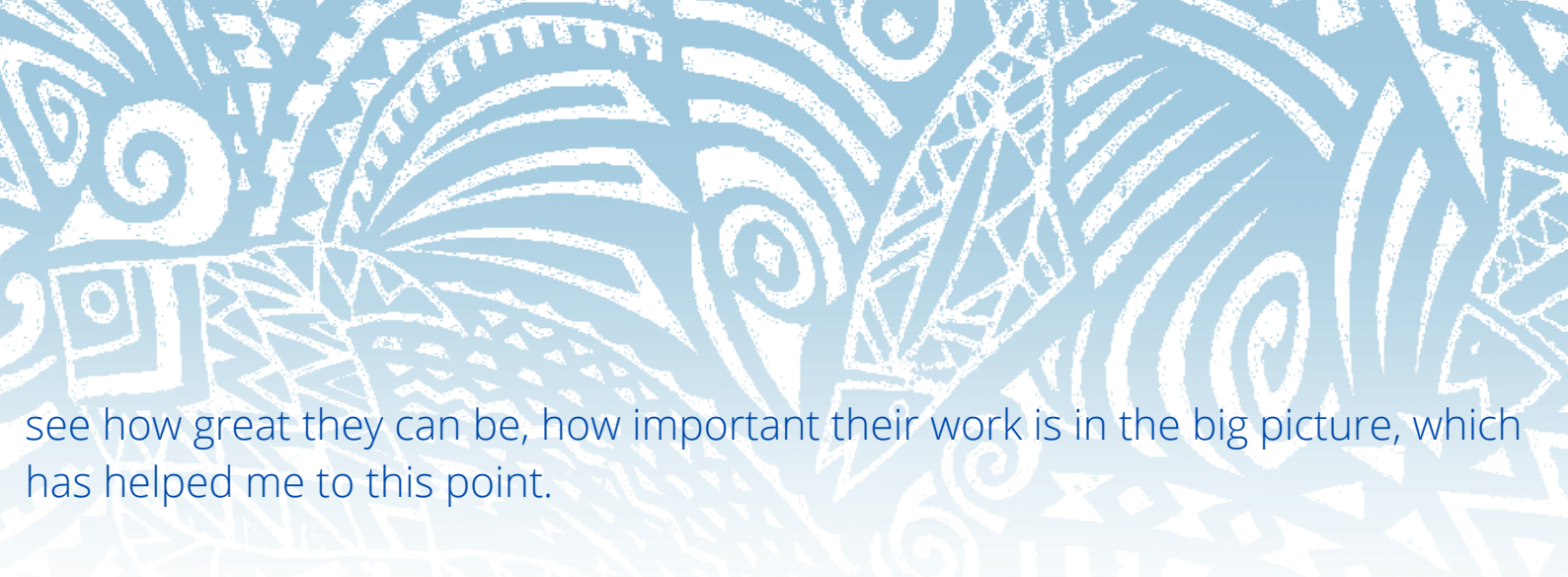
passed to me from my Dad. He is someone I always look up to, and he constantly insists that I keep the big picture in mind and step away from ego. Always look at an issue from the organisation or holistic, connected point of view, he would say. Never look at things in silos; never look at something as your own. Look at what happens to a whole organisation and make decisions that benefit that organisation – of people, of families, of groups.

And it has brought me a long way. At university, I learned about science, I learned about chemistry and biology and all these things. People skills were not part of that curriculum. Yet in any given part of any day, this is probably 90% of my core work.

Staying people-focused along with a priority on what benefits all rather than what benefits the self have helped to bring me to that point where I was the youngest head of division, in my 30s, and already in a management role spending most of my time working with seasoned practitioners, more experienced officers who were fishers before I even entered the service.

I think the friction that can appear around the age gap in Pacific office culture requires clear communication on roles and demands a huge amount of respect between colleagues as people. I enjoy the one-on-one meetings with staff and value that time with them, reporting on their workday or any challenges they are experiencing. For me, it is back to valuing the people factor in what we do.

That is probably the key to anything. Although the goal is to achieve program targets, I do not worry over them. Those are just numbers. It is the people who will deliver the targets, who are my focus. If they know I am understanding of their personal space, they trust me more and show it in terms of delivering targets. I have been told I am the first woman in the post of Director for Fisheries, and I am confident it is these approaches of helping individual people



see how great they can be, how important their work is in the big picture, which has helped me to this point.

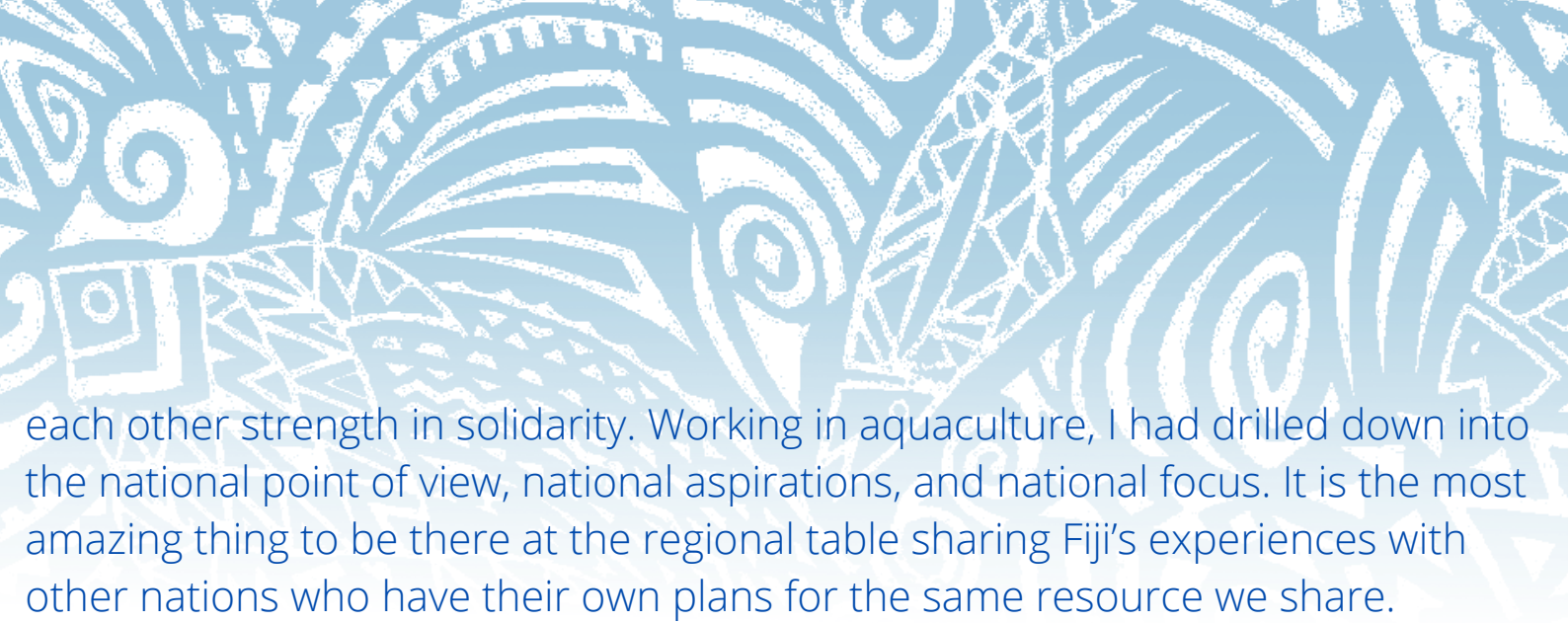
Remaining relevant is a big part of work in today's world. As Director for Fisheries, it has been a recent deep dive into fisheries in terms of the offshore tuna fishery. In the lead-up to this, I attended offshore workshops and training, even though I was still in a core role around aquaculture and inshore fisheries compliance. At the time, tuna fisheries were not part of my work or my core role, but I made an effort and a commitment that one day I was going to gain more experience outside of my comfort zone.

Remaining relevant for me is about being able to dialogue across the sector with any stakeholder and having a certain knowledge of what the issues are. I read up, I asked, I consulted, on anything I did not know.

The biggest lesson from my journey in fisheries so far is that working in isolation never works. In field work, especially, when working across Fiji away from headquarters, I have found this to be true. But your hands and feet are the people around you. I have found stakeholder and networking skills are a big strength, along with never being afraid to say, "I don't know." Some would call it a weakness, but it is just a learning opportunity for me.

I think the most amazing thing about oceanic fisheries work – and it is nothing fancy and nothing big – is just the structure, organisation and sharing across the region and identifying the need to collaborate, to compromise and to share. I recognised at my very first meeting as director that all countries in the region vary, in terms of development. It is a statement you hear in many Pacific meetings, but for oceanic fisheries, it is a reality we acknowledge every time we sit down to work towards stronger national positions through regional fisheries cooperation. At every meeting, I look around the table and see how we offer





each other strength in solidarity. Working in aquaculture, I had drilled down into the national point of view, national aspirations, and national focus. It is the most amazing thing to be there at the regional table sharing Fiji's experiences with other nations who have their own plans for the same resource we share.

I have never been so proud to be a Pacific Islander, and offshore fisheries brings that out. And while I experienced the truth of it during my years working with inshore fisheries, sharing and connecting with stakeholders is of utmost importance. For me, it is not only about the sciences, the expertise, because you can have a brilliant team on board, yet, if we do not connect policy to people, our work is like a fashion fad. It will die out when we do.

When I look at the future and see the issues around food security, social security, the future of fisheries, again I place the importance of individual action into the equation. Whatever we do, the fish can look after themselves in their ecosystems. They know how to balance themselves in their niche habitats and ecosystem, even as external factors like fisheries methods, marine pollution and climate change intrude into their habitats.

It is us who need sorting out. Fisheries management is no longer a management of fisheries: there is such a pull from climate change and oceans, food security and economic forecasting, the current COVID-19 pandemic feeding into more crises, but we need to ensure a lot of focus remains with people. Fisheries is always going to be about balancing a lot of factors in the direction of economic growth and keeping people fed. Striking that balance is a lot of work for Pacific Island economies like Fiji, where so many livelihoods depend on economic growth, and expectations are high for leaders to deliver that.

We have seen a lot of focus around the table, including a call for domestication



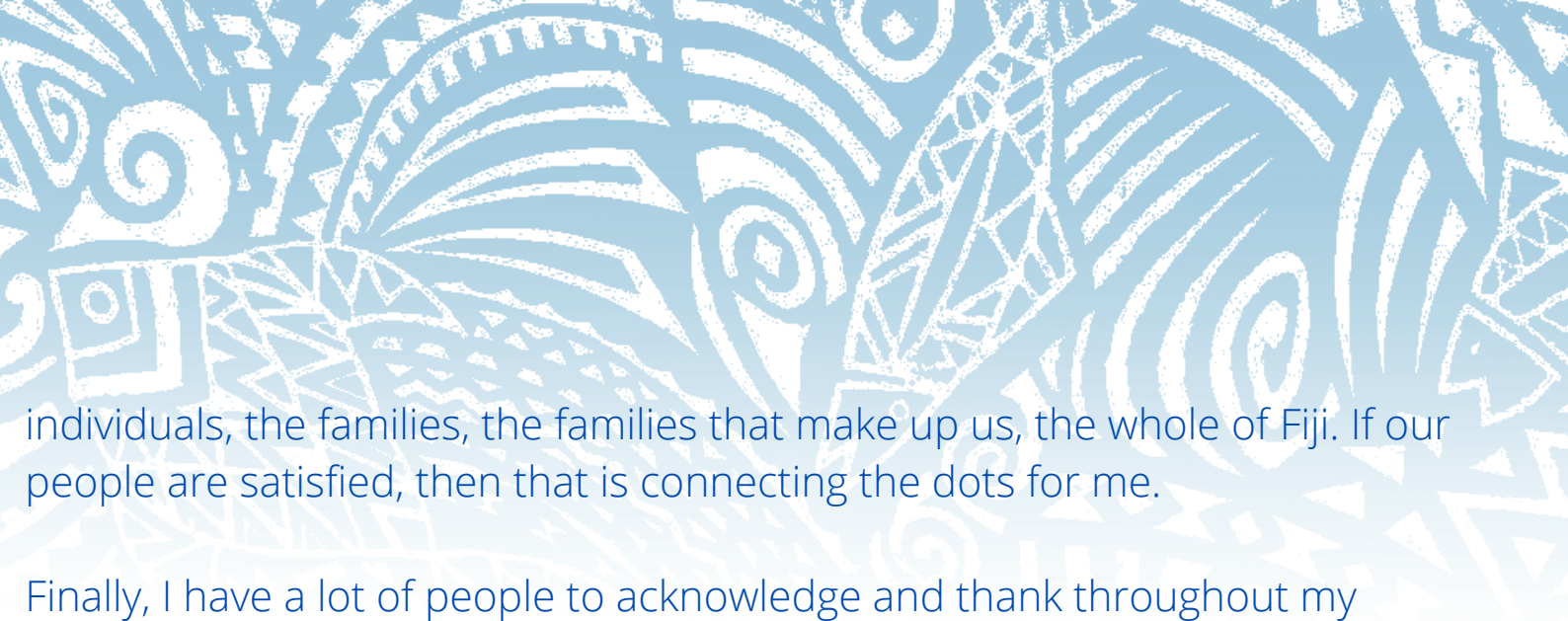
of longline fisheries, and what a predicted loss of up to 50% of coral cover in the future is going to do for food security among our coastal communities. There are no overnight solutions. I do not know all the answers. But the process is going to involve working together, profiling and feedback, and recognising there is no “one size fits all” solution, even within our countries.

I believe profiling is core because you quickly work out who is the most vulnerable in our communities and can keep their priorities and needs in mind. Fiji is blessed to have a lot of opportunities in the fisheries sector. And that is across all our three fisheries: offshore, inshore and aquaculture. In these communities, it is important to profile and gain an idea of the culture of fishing in diverse communities and how people understand fishing. Is it something you do for the table, for sale, or both? Is it a major impact on many lives beyond keeping a family supplied with their protein intake or cultural sharing practices? If there is something that I am passionate about, it is the satisfaction of positive impact.

You do not always see the impact on lives when ticking your targets. I want to know how many people are getting more money after any development intervention. More money does not mean more money in the bank, it can mean being able to provide our children with better schools, equipping them to be tomorrow's leaders. It may be better access to transport to access better hospitals, measures like that. I have had women from communities tell me how a project has allowed them to have a stronger voice in their communities, and that is inspiring. That is impact to me.

Emotionally, they relay that: “Before, I sat in the corner at the meeting; now I talk and take questions at the meeting.” Or to be able to bring fish to feasts, or enable education in boarding schools. It's the impact that matters. All the bigger things in the world of fisheries, they all start small. Through the





individuals, the families, the families that make up us, the whole of Fiji. If our people are satisfied, then that is connecting the dots for me.

Finally, I have a lot of people to acknowledge and thank throughout my professional journey, who have helped form my logic and decision-making today. My mentors, professional counterparts and colleagues (both past and present), my blessed family and loved ones, all of whom have sacrificed time, love and energy to help me stay focused and deliver my level best at all times.

Most importantly, the unwavering support of my dearest husband throughout my career and handling both our parental roles for our five jewels (three boys and two girls) during my 18 months of overseas study is something I am forever grateful for and is definitely a significant factor to my achievements today.

# DEFENDING OUR RIGHTS AND OUR FISH: CAMILLE MOVICK-INATIO

"There's nothing more rewarding and exciting for me than that moment where people commit their countries to a common goal. Putting aside their differences so that, as a region, we can progress makes me happy and proud because that's almost impossible in other regions. And that's what makes us people in the Pacific unique. We put our people first, and we may not always agree, but we will always look after one another."

I didn't know it at the time, but my first job at the FSM Department of Resources and Development shaped me for the step into Oceans and Fish. I was the assistant secretary of the Trade and Investment Division. We were doing quite a lot of trade negotiations with the European Union (EU) for fisheries market access. From those access issues and trade talks, I began to glimpse an entirely different world around the tuna question, especially around



conservation and management rules of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), which has its headquarters in Pohnpei.

In my resources and development work, the focus was primarily on being able to export our fish to the EU market, not so much on the conservation and preservation of the stock. My NORMA [National Oceanic Resource Management Authority] role has brought in that extra





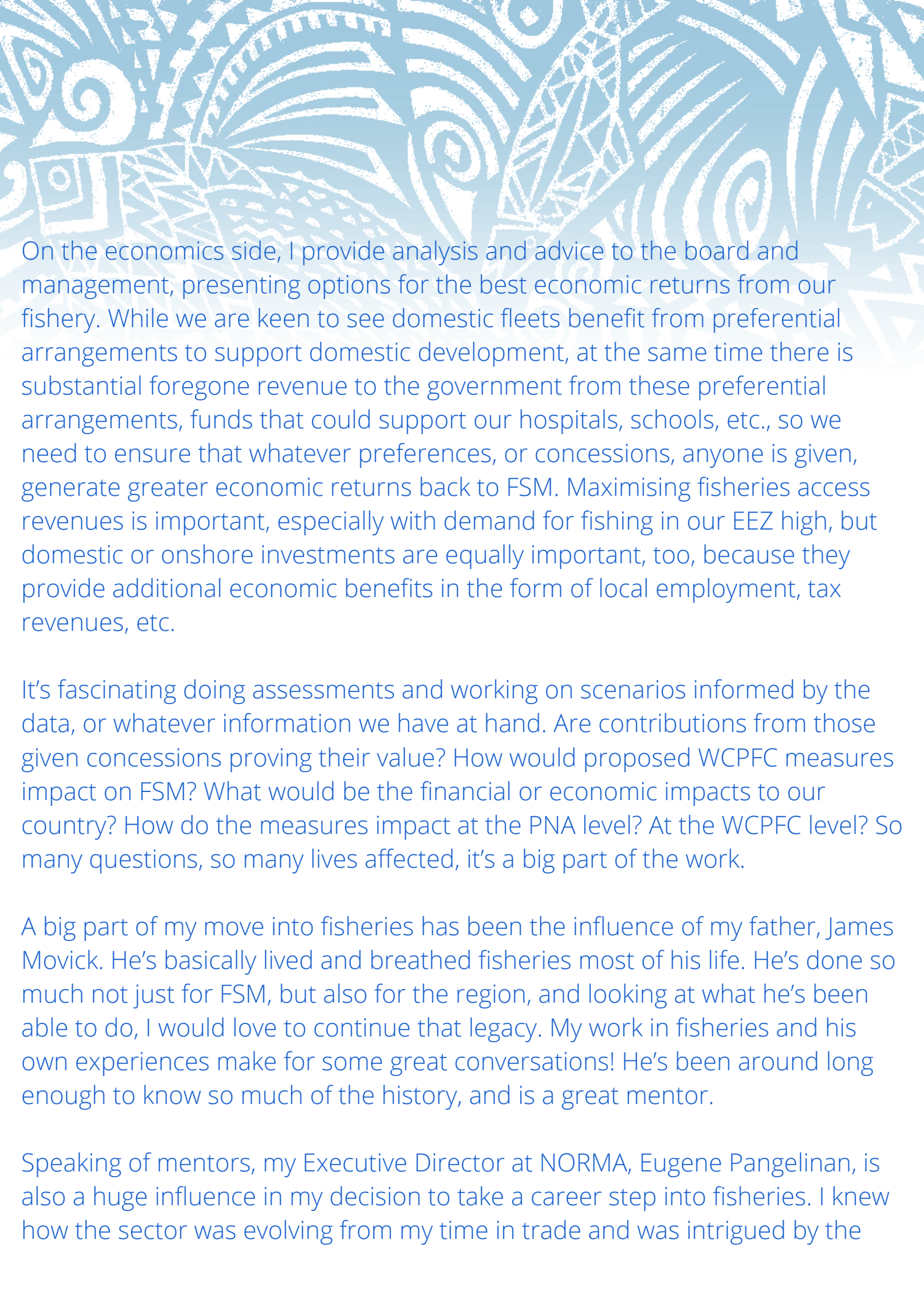
layer of ensuring you make the best of the economic opportunities now, while ensuring you do have something to export in the future – so it's made me realise the journeys in fisheries work involve a lot more than fishing.

At meetings like the WCPFC sessions, much of why we are here is around the conservation aspect of it. And in spaces like this you come to realise just how important fisheries is, not just to FSM but to the entire Pacific region. Perhaps Papua New Guinea is an exception with all its other resources, and Fiji to some extent with its tourism lead on the rest of the Pacific. But for the rest of the small island, large ocean developing states, that's our bread and butter right there. If you're going to talk about trade, our fish is perhaps the only commodity most of us can trade.

So, throughout my career so far, the significance of fisheries was and remains that ongoing need to generate revenue to sustain economies. It's an attractive option for those who can see that it's a career choice where there's so much going on and a lot of range when it comes to choices.

Even from the trade corner, I can see the support and priorities when it comes to budget for fisheries compared to other sectors, simply because it's an area that generates so much revenue back. It's what made me decide to move into this field; to see how much I can do to ensure this resource, which we greatly depend on, continues to feed our economy in the future.

My role as the VDS [Vessel Day Scheme] Administrator is to ensure vessels fishing in our exclusive economic zone (EEZ) are within their reported vessel day allocations. I monitor those fishing under the FSM arrangement in the same way, monitoring activities to ensure the proper trades, processing and purchasing of vessel days are managed.



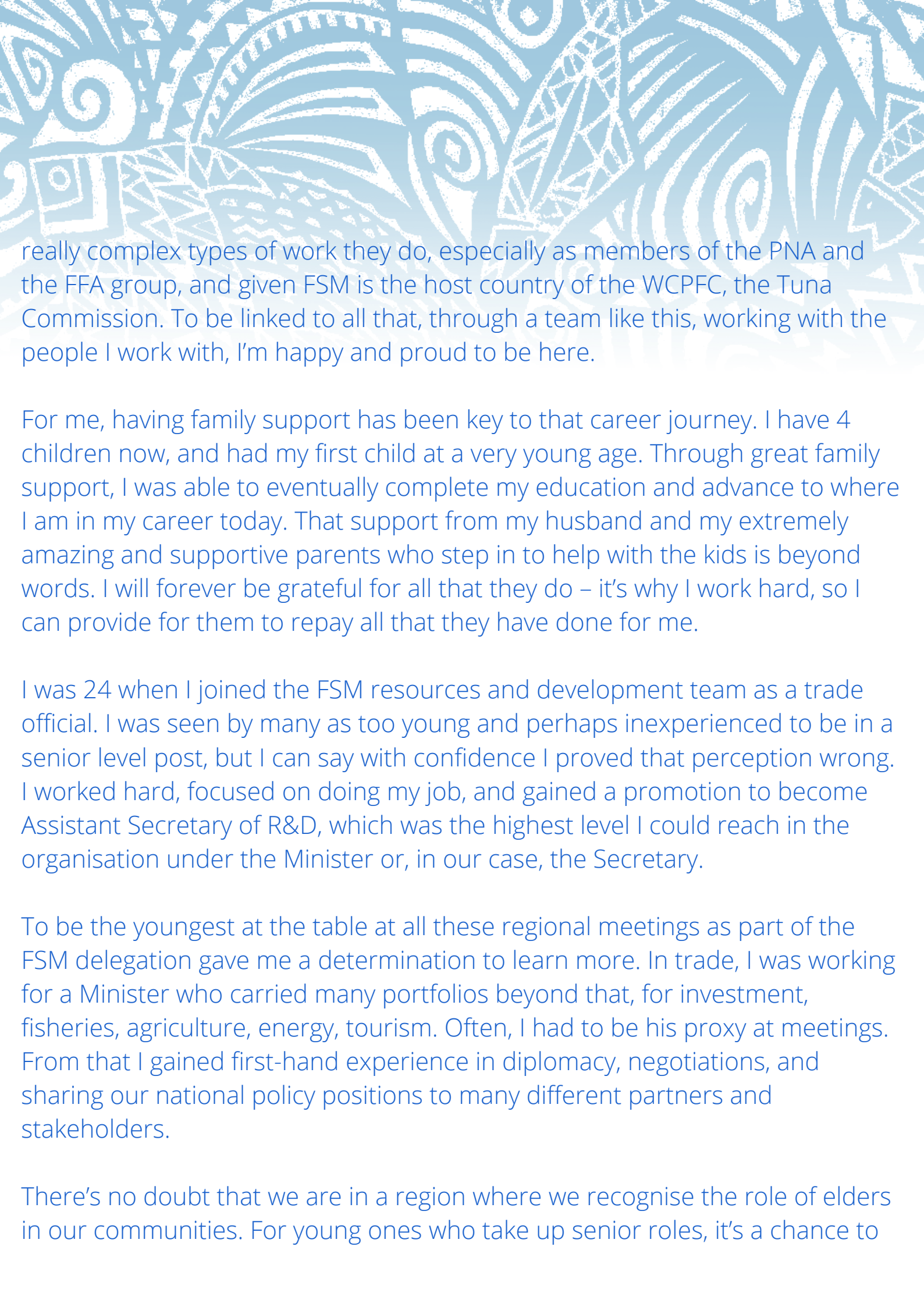
On the economics side, I provide analysis and advice to the board and management, presenting options for the best economic returns from our fishery. While we are keen to see domestic fleets benefit from preferential arrangements to support domestic development, at the same time there is substantial foregone revenue to the government from these preferential arrangements, funds that could support our hospitals, schools, etc., so we need to ensure that whatever preferences, or concessions, anyone is given, generate greater economic returns back to FSM. Maximising fisheries access revenues is important, especially with demand for fishing in our EEZ high, but domestic or onshore investments are equally important, too, because they provide additional economic benefits in the form of local employment, tax revenues, etc.

It's fascinating doing assessments and working on scenarios informed by the data, or whatever information we have at hand. Are contributions from those given concessions proving their value? How would proposed WCPFC measures impact on FSM? What would be the financial or economic impacts to our country? How do the measures impact at the PNA level? At the WCPFC level? So many questions, so many lives affected, it's a big part of the work.

A big part of my move into fisheries has been the influence of my father, James Movick. He's basically lived and breathed fisheries most of his life. He's done so much not just for FSM, but also for the region, and looking at what he's been able to do, I would love to continue that legacy. My work in fisheries and his own experiences make for some great conversations! He's been around long enough to know so much of the history, and is a great mentor.

Speaking of mentors, my Executive Director at NORMA, Eugene Pangelinan, is also a huge influence in my decision to take a career step into fisheries. I knew how the sector was evolving from my time in trade and was intrigued by the





really complex types of work they do, especially as members of the PNA and the FFA group, and given FSM is the host country of the WCPFC, the Tuna Commission. To be linked to all that, through a team like this, working with the people I work with, I'm happy and proud to be here.

For me, having family support has been key to that career journey. I have 4 children now, and had my first child at a very young age. Through great family support, I was able to eventually complete my education and advance to where I am in my career today. That support from my husband and my extremely amazing and supportive parents who step in to help with the kids is beyond words. I will forever be grateful for all that they do – it's why I work hard, so I can provide for them to repay all that they have done for me.

I was 24 when I joined the FSM resources and development team as a trade official. I was seen by many as too young and perhaps inexperienced to be in a senior level post, but I can say with confidence I proved that perception wrong. I worked hard, focused on doing my job, and gained a promotion to become Assistant Secretary of R&D, which was the highest level I could reach in the organisation under the Minister or, in our case, the Secretary.

To be the youngest at the table at all these regional meetings as part of the FSM delegation gave me a determination to learn more. In trade, I was working for a Minister who carried many portfolios beyond that, for investment, fisheries, agriculture, energy, tourism. Often, I had to be his proxy at meetings. From that I gained first-hand experience in diplomacy, negotiations, and sharing our national policy positions to many different partners and stakeholders.

There's no doubt that we are in a region where we recognise the role of elders in our communities. For young ones who take up senior roles, it's a chance to



learn from the wisdom of being in a room with so many of the “tall trees” of the community but not being overwhelmed by it. You are there to do a job, and you need to get on with it.

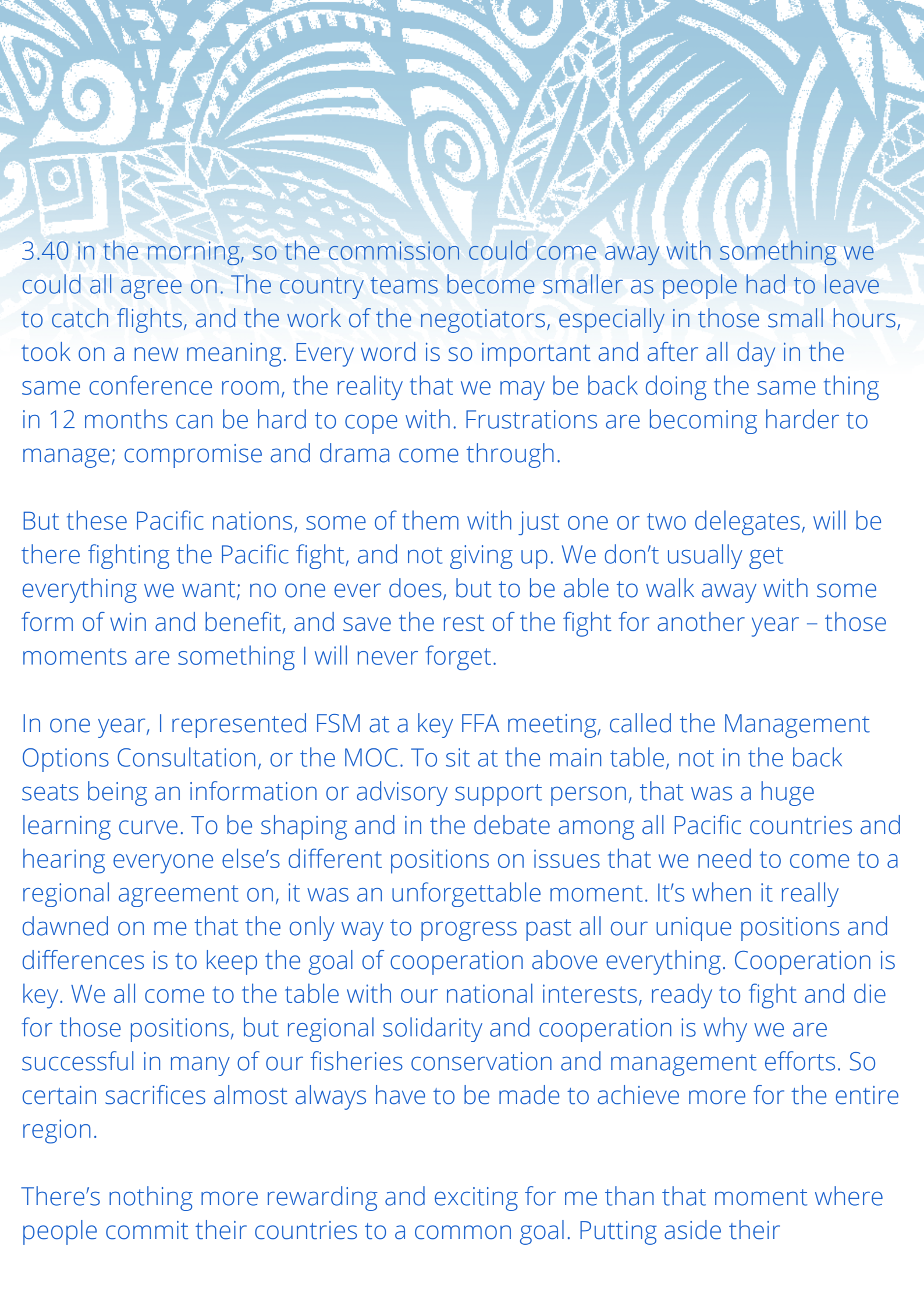
As well as being young, being a woman in this field, yes, you do notice almost immediately how the age and the gender gaps are. But honestly speaking, I’ve never actually really felt that I was discriminated against in some ways because I was the youngest, or the woman, not in my office for sure. Maybe because of the position I held (and hold).

Like every other sector where there are decisions being made, there are far more men than women. It’s not just fisheries, but I have noticed an increasing number of women coming through. The years are passing, and the numbers are growing, especially in areas like fisheries and trade. Forum Fisheries now has its first woman director-general, and I anticipate that into the future we will continue to see more and more women assuming leadership roles in this sector.

I would encourage young career seekers out there who are wondering whether to take on oceanic fisheries to go for it! The work is complex and very demanding but when you see the result of the sweat that you put into it, it’s a wonderful feeling. It makes me happy to know that I contribute to the work that generates the revenue that funds our public services and projects and facilitates the onshore investments that employ our local people. I tell myself, “Wow! Did I really contribute to all of that?!”

And the wow moments continue at the regional level, often away from the public eye. Like ocean fisheries, ocean negotiations happen away from the public eye, so it’s not an area many are aware of. For example, at the 2017 WCPFC meeting in Manila, on that final night the plenary session went on until



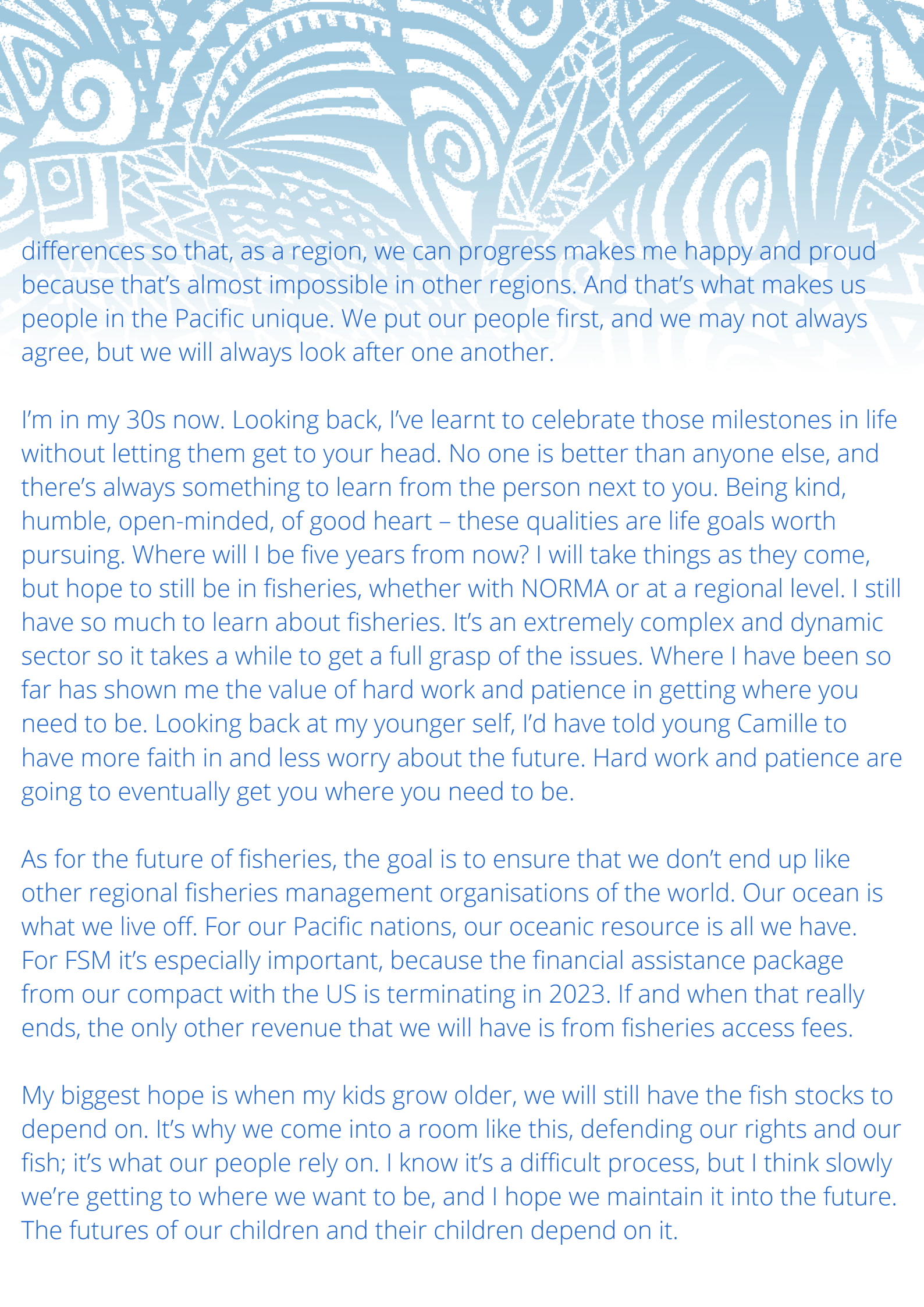


3.40 in the morning, so the commission could come away with something we could all agree on. The country teams become smaller as people had to leave to catch flights, and the work of the negotiators, especially in those small hours, took on a new meaning. Every word is so important and after all day in the same conference room, the reality that we may be back doing the same thing in 12 months can be hard to cope with. Frustrations are becoming harder to manage; compromise and drama come through.

But these Pacific nations, some of them with just one or two delegates, will be there fighting the Pacific fight, and not giving up. We don't usually get everything we want; no one ever does, but to be able to walk away with some form of win and benefit, and save the rest of the fight for another year – those moments are something I will never forget.

In one year, I represented FSM at a key FFA meeting, called the Management Options Consultation, or the MOC. To sit at the main table, not in the back seats being an information or advisory support person, that was a huge learning curve. To be shaping and in the debate among all Pacific countries and hearing everyone else's different positions on issues that we need to come to a regional agreement on, it was an unforgettable moment. It's when it really dawned on me that the only way to progress past all our unique positions and differences is to keep the goal of cooperation above everything. Cooperation is key. We all come to the table with our national interests, ready to fight and die for those positions, but regional solidarity and cooperation is why we are successful in many of our fisheries conservation and management efforts. So certain sacrifices almost always have to be made to achieve more for the entire region.

There's nothing more rewarding and exciting for me than that moment where people commit their countries to a common goal. Putting aside their



differences so that, as a region, we can progress makes me happy and proud because that's almost impossible in other regions. And that's what makes us people in the Pacific unique. We put our people first, and we may not always agree, but we will always look after one another.

I'm in my 30s now. Looking back, I've learnt to celebrate those milestones in life without letting them get to your head. No one is better than anyone else, and there's always something to learn from the person next to you. Being kind, humble, open-minded, of good heart – these qualities are life goals worth pursuing. Where will I be five years from now? I will take things as they come, but hope to still be in fisheries, whether with NORMA or at a regional level. I still have so much to learn about fisheries. It's an extremely complex and dynamic sector so it takes a while to get a full grasp of the issues. Where I have been so far has shown me the value of hard work and patience in getting where you need to be. Looking back at my younger self, I'd have told young Camille to have more faith in and less worry about the future. Hard work and patience are going to eventually get you where you need to be.

As for the future of fisheries, the goal is to ensure that we don't end up like other regional fisheries management organisations of the world. Our ocean is what we live off. For our Pacific nations, our oceanic resource is all we have. For FSM it's especially important, because the financial assistance package from our compact with the US is terminating in 2023. If and when that really ends, the only other revenue that we will have is from fisheries access fees.

My biggest hope is when my kids grow older, we will still have the fish stocks to depend on. It's why we come into a room like this, defending our rights and our fish; it's what our people rely on. I know it's a difficult process, but I think slowly we're getting to where we want to be, and I hope we maintain it into the future. The futures of our children and their children depend on it.



# LIVING THE DREAM: JOYCE SAMUEL UAH-LEONG

“Whether you are national or regional, one thing doesn’t change: at the centre of all the work we do is the humble tuna fish which feeds millions and millions of dollars into our Pacific nations and is eaten all over the world.”

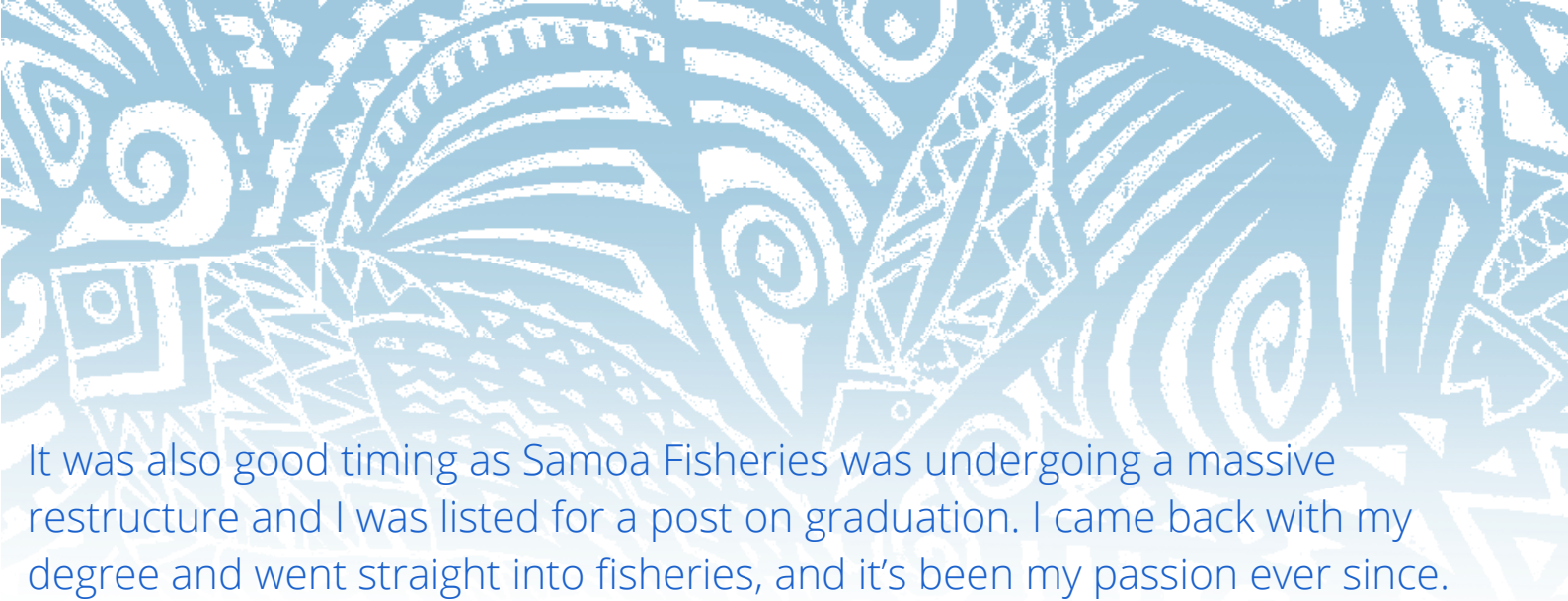
I came into fisheries because my Dad thought I was playing too much rugby while my classmates were getting jobs. True story.

He just turned to me one day and said, “You better go find a job.” I went to the Public Service Commission office, keen to see if they had any work in the environment ministry. I remember the lady behind the desk telling me the environment jobs were all taken, looking at my study program at USP and saying how my marine biology degree program sounded like something related to fisheries. She gave me a letter and told me to head over to the fisheries

“ministry.

It was an eye-opening experience for me. My marine biology degree, which I had taken only through for my passion for the environment, suddenly made sense. The field work and my love for the sea, all in seven months of on-the-job experience – snorkelling doing coral reef monitoring, fish monitoring, invertebrate monitoring, fish-market surveys, fish-landing surveys – even a krill census! By the end of that seven-month experience, when I headed back to Fiji for my studies, I knew fisheries was where I wanted to be.





It was also good timing as Samoa Fisheries was undergoing a massive restructure and I was listed for a post on graduation. I came back with my degree and went straight into fisheries, and it's been my passion ever since. Right now, I'm a fisheries management adviser with the Forum Fisheries Agency in Honiara, working with our countries on fisheries policy, management systems and processes. This links to our regional voice at the Pacific Tuna Commission, or WCPFC. That's a huge focus of my current work, supporting our Pacific nations in the technical meetings and annual Tuna Commission session, helping members to discuss and develop regional positions on the issues relating to management of the tuna fishery.

Fisheries management work in the Pacific is really living the dream for me. I can't see myself doing anything else. I'm not really one for over-thinking things or wanting to know where I will be a decade from now. I am more an in-the-moment kind of person. And fisheries are such a critical part in our lives as Pacific people. As large ocean states, we depend on fisheries for livelihoods, income generation, economic benefits. Tuna fisheries are the economic core for many of the Pacific island states, particularly the small island states. It's such an important field that for many Pacific nations you can just look around and say tuna money did that, license fees did that. It's more than food: it affects how governments earn, and cover goods and services for their people. Then, of course, there is the private sector and employment benefits; the list goes on. That's been part of the dynamics of tuna fisheries management in the region for many decades. It continues to evolve and shift.

With all the latest changes, science, and technologies to improve what our nations are doing, and how we work in this field, it's exciting work. Even though it's been my only career choice, I feel like there's fresh directions every time I look. I don't feel myself feeling tired and wondering what the next move will be. I just know that in less than a decade this sector is going to look different – an





improved version of what we see now. In that sense, I want to continue to be the best that I can be in this role of service to the Pacific, with all its exciting challenges and opportunities.

Through all my meetings and travel to Honiara or around the region and beyond to represent Samoa Fisheries at the FFA level, I was inspired by the work here and had my sights set on eventually doing the same. Working at the regional level requires a step up in professional intensity and approach. It's a chance for those who want to take national experience and career networking to the next level.

But whether you are national or regional, one thing doesn't change: at the centre of all the work we do is the humble tuna fish, which feeds millions and millions of dollars into our Pacific nations and is eaten all over the world. There have been many standout memories along the way. When Tokelau was chair of the Forum Fisheries [Committee], hosting the forum officials in Nukunonu and then the ministerial [meeting] in Atafu, it struck me how many fisheries officials and leaders were affected by the boat travel between Apia and Tokelau—talking about oceanic fisheries is one thing, and being out in the ocean habitat of the tuna was another!

A more solemn moment was the presentation of the Samoa Fisheries Management Bill to a parliamentary review committee, and with members of parliament invited to sit in. I was head of fisheries at the time, holding a bill with all its clauses in English and doing my translation and discussion in Samoan to the elected leaders. I thought of my parents and all they had done for me—especially my father and his “get a job” push for me, which started it all. It was a huge moment. The bill went through to its third and final reading with no changes, although it was almost 10 years of drafting before it made it to Parliament, and I don't think there's many women who've been able to have that



memory of Parliament.

Fisheries is the same kind of space: more men than women across all senior levels, unless you are in the cannery or the market. But things are changing. I know when I started, I was one of a handful of women fisheries officers back then. There's still an imbalance in the numbers, but the scale of our contribution is equal, and I think there's a camaraderie and support which is above gender issues. I don't think coming into a male-dominated environment bothered me that much. It helped strengthen relationships for us female colleagues; we were like sisters in fisheries, and it was the same at the regional meetings and networks, to this day. From the early days of my career, I brought an attitude with me which refuses to let gender be an issue for anything. I've always had that strong-headed approach to life, so if it was happening around me, I was probably a bit blind to it, to be honest.

Realistically, the future of fisheries will remain challenging. There have been so many changes, both natural and man-made, and it will continue to require all the demanding work to continue what those who've come before us in setting up arrangements and processes have started. I have faith in the Pacific way of producing solutions to fit our circumstances, even while we are nodding at everything that's happening in the world around us. We've worked very hard over the years and put together many arrangements, systems and processes that allow us to work within ourselves to withstand our changing environment. It's important to improve, to be ahead of the times, such as with technology.

Ten years ago, everything was a paper trail, now we're talking about electronic monitoring, electronic reporting, and that is making us look across at everything else we do – our systems and processes across the board. These also need to step up and maybe transform to another level of management where we're no longer talking about just identifying risk, we are implementing risk management



and improving systems for monitoring and evaluation in a timely way. It's got to be a constant part of work because fisheries management is constantly changing, enforcement is always expanding, and change is a fact of everything we do.

Pacific nations are sovereign owners and responsible for the world's largest ocean areas and EEZs [exclusive economic zones]. The management of the tuna resources is something that heads of fisheries and anyone who works or studies in this field takes so seriously, because the oceans are connected to everything else in our communities. That's how engaged people are.

Acronyms are part of any regional organisation's work. It's not just in fisheries. I would say WCPFC is probably my favourite. I just like the way it sounds. But imagine having to say that whole Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission every time you talk about the Tuna Commission [laughs], so that's a definite favourite, simply watching people trying to get through the mouthful. The least favourite depends on what pops up at any time. Right now, it's the CMS, or catch management system, where the specifics of fisheries gear and species are so detailed and there's so much data around each species, bycatch from fishing, and so on. [But it's] an important part of keeping on top of fisheries licensing compliance and sustainable management.

Ten years down the track, I'd like to be in a role where I am providing experience and knowledge to those countries that need it in fisheries, maybe working for myself, if I am not still in regional service with FFA or from another corner of the region.

Advice to my younger self? I would say, take more risk, look beyond and outside of the box. When you're young, you can take more risk and have a go. You don't have to be the smartest in the room. You do have to work hard and be





prepared for challenges and opportunities in equal measure. What I've seen is the ones who seem smartest are often just the best-prepared, and anyone can do that. I think strong work and team ethics go a long way in any career. For regional work, they are essential.

In this field, I have so many people that I look to for inspiration. They are too many to name. Of course, our Director-General, Dr Manu Tupou-Roosen. I've known her prior to that role, and seen the work she puts in. I've seen so many fellow friends and colleagues from my years in fisheries accept senior roles at national and regional levels, and they've all taught me something. They take the time for conversation, and it's always the type of talk where you leave inspired and wanting to do better and work harder.

The wisdom I would share comes from my faith. One phrase I often pull out to gain strength or live by is that the will of God will not take you where the grace of God will not protect you. It really sums up everything for me, and the other comes from an economics teacher back in Samoa, who told me: if you fail to prepare, then prepare to fail.

As a mum, I also believe in balance. My rule is never taking my work home. At home, there is a whole other set of commitments that kick in. In our family and communities, we all have cultural ties and obligations that you must balance. At the end of the day, keeping that balance is so important to being a better person, wherever you are.

# PACIFIC OCEAN'S HIDDEN FIGURE: SANGAALOA TOOKI CLARK

"These are fascinating and exciting fields to be in and being able to use the skills to assist your country and your people - that is hard to beat! In this field and area of work, I think you need to be able to work alone when necessary and be self-contained. But the perception that maths and science require a cool, detached, robotic approach is definitely not my reality!"

I came into fisheries through my love for science and maths.

The 70s and 80s were a big coming of age for my country. Kiribati and Tuvalu emerged from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and I was looking for jobs that could capture my interests in science and maths. At that time, fisheries work was the only work that came close to combining those interests for me. It was either that, medicine or teaching. I ended up going to USP in Fiji, but there was

no fisheries degree at the time. There was biology, that was the closest, or a diploma in tropical fisheries. I did a Bachelor of Science degree in maths and biology.

When I first started working in fisheries after I graduated, it was





early days for the Convention on the Law of the Sea; it was all coming together. The EEZs [exclusive economic zones] and licensing were coming in, and I was the Kiribati Fisheries Statistics and Licensing Officer. Those were the early days of Pacific nations taking back their rights to their seas. In 1982, PNG arrested the Danica and two years later, the Solomon Islands got tired of reporting all the US fishing vessels in its waters to the US government. They seized the Jeanette Diana. When the US government launched its embargo, the Solomon Islands responded by kicking all the US fishing boats out of its EEZ.

In Kiribati, where there was also lots of sighted unlicensed fishing, we followed suit and licensed Russian fishing boats to come fish in our waters, because of the stand-off between the Pacific and the US. Vanuatu also did the same, in solidarity with what was happening in PNG and the Solomon Islands. That situation with Russia licensed to fish in Pacific EEZs lasted about a year, and given the geopolitics of the time, it eventually brought the US to the Pacific table. By the time they had drafted and agreed on the signing of a unique fishing agreement between the United States and all the Pacific island countries of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), I happened to be there. I had just joined FFA at the time on attachment from Kiribati, so went to Port Moresby in 1987. It was a major moment for the Pacific, and a privilege for me to be there!

Being at FFA took me on another adventure: I met my husband Les and we got married in Honiara, then went to Fiji, Oman and on to Namibia. Wherever we lived, I did some part-time roles – teaching science to school kids in Namibia, helping a local fishing company there with their database and finance systems, and witnessing the growth of a country that was coming out of apartheid and into a process of what they called Namibianisation. But in the end, we needed to come home to the Pacific.

In 2000, we came back from Namibia to the Solomon Islands. Les took up a job





with FFA but, due to the tense period and the ages of our children, I stayed with them in New Zealand while he worked in Honiara.

I thought I would use the time to get back to school and update my skills, so took on post-grad studies in computing. Just catching up on the advances in computing was a big leap. My first experience of computing at USP was during the age of cards, where there was a card for every character, so, for an algorithm, you would have a big bundle of cards which had to be taken to be run on the one computing machine in the city. Now, there I was trying to catch up on the past 10 years' advances in computer technology. It was like jumping into deep water without learning how to swim first!

Our children and I joined Les in Honiara in 2002, after which we all moved to New Zealand in 2004, with our children going through their final years of secondary school and on to university. It was around then that I went back and started part-time studies again at Lincoln University. That led to a PhD in mathematical and computational modelling.

In 2010, when the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office (PNAO) was first set up, I was recruited by the office to do consultancy work on the PNA Vessel Day Scheme (VDS). This included looking at the VDS and determining what information would prove helpful to countries for managing their VDS days. The work included reviewing the VDS text as well as analysing the data available on effort in parties' zones, and presenting the information to parties in a useful and comprehensive way. It was exciting to see countries make use of the information to start formulating strategic plans and collaborating together to maximise benefit from their VDS.

During a special meeting in Nauru in 2010, in response to the analysis showing that Nauru's days were due to run out, Nauru announced that they would close

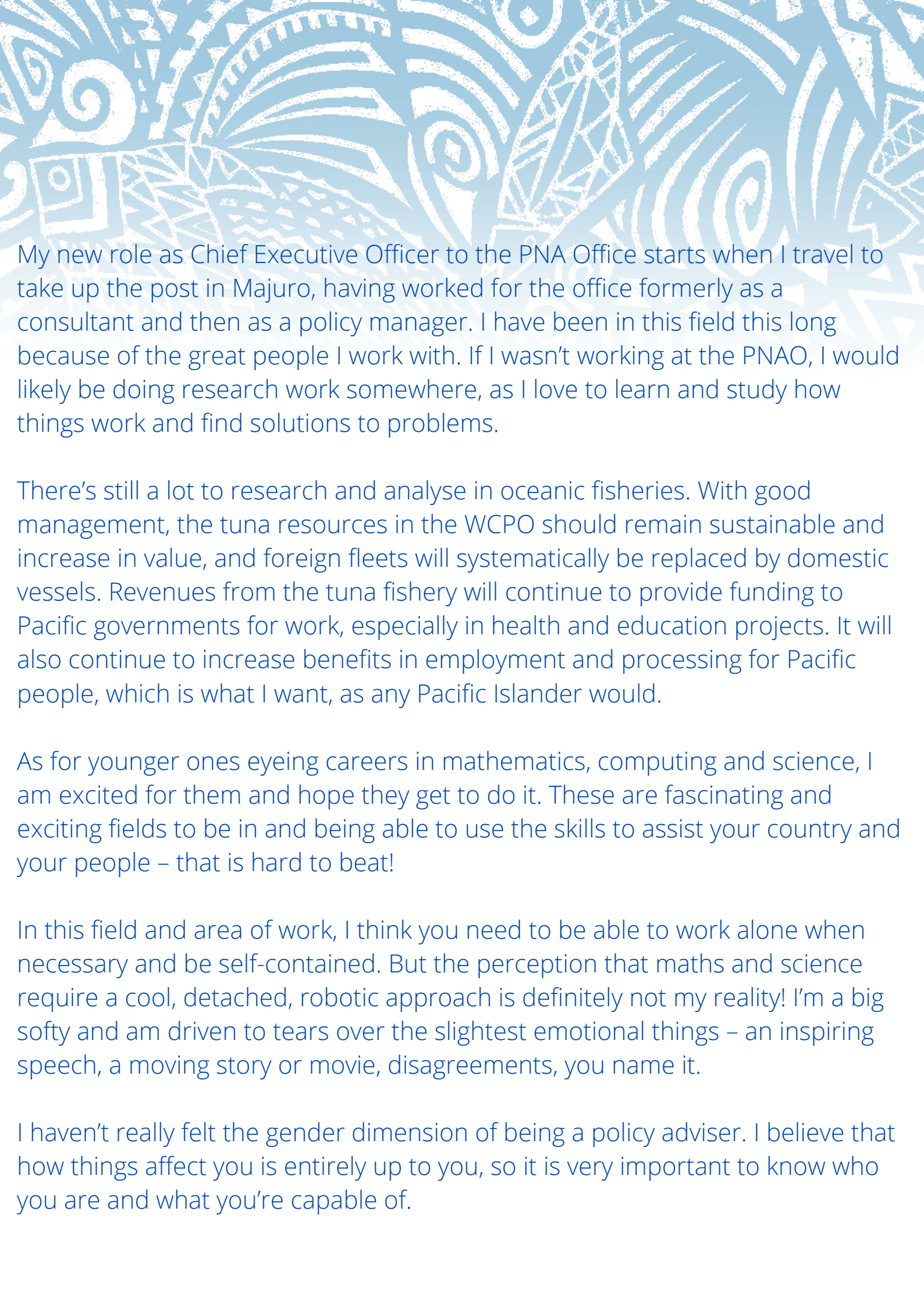


their EEZ when that happened. I personally think that that marked the turning point in zone-based fisheries management and the VDS. It would have made companies realise also, that the traditional annual fishing licenses could no longer provide certainty of their fishing activities in PNA zones: they needed to buy VDS days.

Subsequently, Nauru and the Solomon Islands became the first countries to close their zones the following year, when their PAEs were reached. This coincided with a special PNA official meeting in Nadi and certain companies that were fishing in Solomon Islands at the time came to Nadi to negotiate on the side of the PNA meeting, on how to continue fishing in Solomons EEZ. This led to the US\$5,000 per day price that became the minimum benchmark, signed by PNA ministers at the FFC [Fisheries Forum Committee] meeting in Apia straight after the meeting in Nadi. The rest is history.

When I look at the journey and how far we have come as a region, I think the biggest change I've seen in the last four decades has been the confidence and the respect that Pacific nations have gained as they asserted their rights over their resources and their waters.

When I first started attending WCPFC meetings, it was to represent Tokelau, because I used to do some fisheries consultancy work for them and, sometimes, when they couldn't attend, they would kindly have me attend on their behalf, which was a great privilege for me. At the time, we would just sit and listen to the big countries talking to themselves, and we were always quiet and never said anything. I would wonder, "How does this work? Do we just sit and listen to these people discuss and decide what to do with our zones and our fish? There's something wrong with this." But all that has changed now – it is quite different.



My new role as Chief Executive Officer to the PNA Office starts when I travel to take up the post in Majuro, having worked for the office formerly as a consultant and then as a policy manager. I have been in this field this long because of the great people I work with. If I wasn't working at the PNAO, I would likely be doing research work somewhere, as I love to learn and study how things work and find solutions to problems.

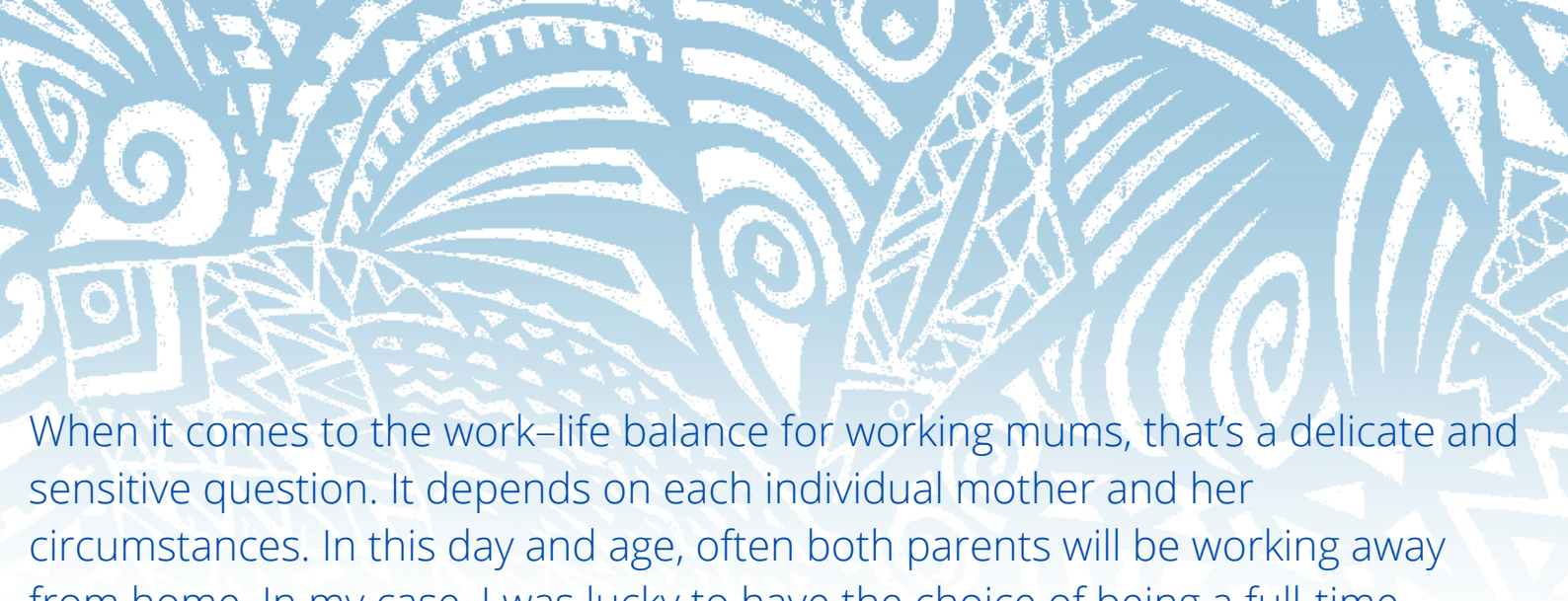
There's still a lot to research and analyse in oceanic fisheries. With good management, the tuna resources in the WCPO should remain sustainable and increase in value, and foreign fleets will systematically be replaced by domestic vessels. Revenues from the tuna fishery will continue to provide funding to Pacific governments for work, especially in health and education projects. It will also continue to increase benefits in employment and processing for Pacific people, which is what I want, as any Pacific Islander would.

As for younger ones eyeing careers in mathematics, computing and science, I am excited for them and hope they get to do it. These are fascinating and exciting fields to be in and being able to use the skills to assist your country and your people – that is hard to beat!

In this field and area of work, I think you need to be able to work alone when necessary and be self-contained. But the perception that maths and science require a cool, detached, robotic approach is definitely not my reality! I'm a big softy and am driven to tears over the slightest emotional things – an inspiring speech, a moving story or movie, disagreements, you name it.

I haven't really felt the gender dimension of being a policy adviser. I believe that how things affect you is entirely up to you, so it is very important to know who you are and what you're capable of.





When it comes to the work–life balance for working mums, that's a delicate and sensitive question. It depends on each individual mother and her circumstances. In this day and age, often both parents will be working away from home. In my case, I was lucky to have the choice of being a full-time housewife and mother to my children, because that was what I aspired to be – to look after my children and be just like my mum, Eimi.

She was my role model: she loved me unconditionally and was always there for me. She died when I was 15, but the love she gave me has been with me and sustained me all my life, and it's a bond I wanted my children to have as well. I also see them as my role models because they make my life complete and, like Les, are a constant source of inspiration. When they got older and didn't need my full-time support, I was lucky to have been able to go back to school and, from there, get back into the workforce and be of some use. I couldn't ask for more.

I'm happy where I am now. I am committed to the work I do for PNA. It is very rewarding, especially when I feel like I'm contributing something. Otherwise, just put me in a room with a computer, problems to solve and a lot of data – and I'll be happy.

# THE SEA A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: RACHAEL LURU

"The most difficult part of being out at sea is getting used to being the only woman in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by men who are not your relatives, not your wantoks, and not your friends. You are there to do a job that they understand is going to show how good or how bad they are at compliance with the rules of fishing, and the best-case scenario is when they ignore you so you can watch them at work."

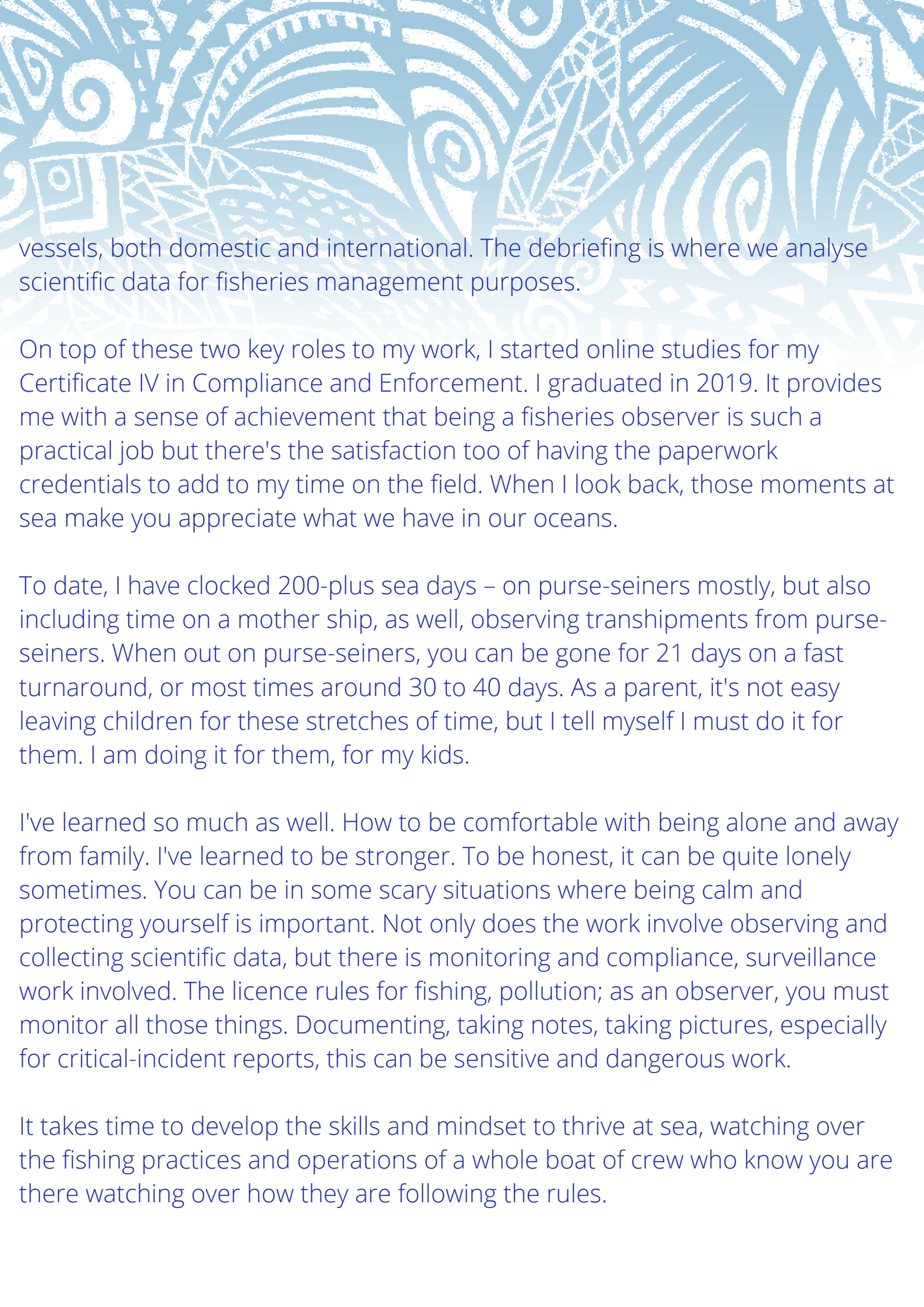
I never grew up dreaming of a career in the fisheries sector. I wanted to be a lawyer, so when the time came, I was preparing to study law.

It just happened that I was going through the newspaper and came across an advertisement for fisheries observers, and it caught my interest. I decided to take a chance and apply, and was shortlisted for the interview. Not long after that I got a shock to receive a letter and an airplane ticket. It was a job offer

with the PNG National Fisheries Authority Observer Programme, and I was being flown to Kavieng for two months basic observer training. That was more than 10 years ago. I've been doing this ever since.

As a fisheries observer and debriefer assessor, my key role is collecting scientific data on fishing





vessels, both domestic and international. The debriefing is where we analyse scientific data for fisheries management purposes.

On top of these two key roles to my work, I started online studies for my Certificate IV in Compliance and Enforcement. I graduated in 2019. It provides me with a sense of achievement that being a fisheries observer is such a practical job but there's the satisfaction too of having the paperwork credentials to add to my time on the field. When I look back, those moments at sea make you appreciate what we have in our oceans.

To date, I have clocked 200-plus sea days – on purse-seiners mostly, but also including time on a mother ship, as well, observing transhipments from purse-seiners. When out on purse-seiners, you can be gone for 21 days on a fast turnaround, or most times around 30 to 40 days. As a parent, it's not easy leaving children for these stretches of time, but I tell myself I must do it for them. I am doing it for them, for my kids.

I've learned so much as well. How to be comfortable with being alone and away from family. I've learned to be stronger. To be honest, it can be quite lonely sometimes. You can be in some scary situations where being calm and protecting yourself is important. Not only does the work involve observing and collecting scientific data, but there is monitoring and compliance, surveillance work involved. The licence rules for fishing, pollution; as an observer, you must monitor all those things. Documenting, taking notes, taking pictures, especially for critical-incident reports, this can be sensitive and dangerous work.

It takes time to develop the skills and mindset to thrive at sea, watching over the fishing practices and operations of a whole boat of crew who know you are there watching over how they are following the rules.





You are far from land, their eyes are on the next fish, your eyes are on them, but who is watching out for you?

So, yes, there are times of real danger. There was one job where I was using my camera to record a scene and one of the crew wanted me to put my device away because he felt threatened. He attacked me. I had my employers backing me with support all the way, helping to track down the crew member. It was the most terrifying thing I had ever experienced. My camera was lost in the middle of that fight. I went back and forth in court hearings for three years, and the case was dismissed. But I never let it keep me from the sea. I didn't stop taking observer trips. If anything, it made me even stronger!

It can be hard being out at times, but I know I am working to eventually ensure a future for my family. I was three months pregnant on one trip, it was 40 days at sea and I was throwing up every day. I disembarked in Tarawa and switched to desk duties (debriefing and assessing observer data) while I had my baby.

But being an observer is one of those things where, even on land, the sea will call you back. I am lucky, I love my job. And I must go back. It's not a normal day in the office. It's a great way to get away from problems! The sampling work, the languages, and different nationalities around you. I've had fun learning how to talk with sign language and a few words in other languages here and there.

There's so much to fisheries. We don't only collect scientific data. We watch and record what other vessels out at sea are doing, and we speak to observers on other vessels using radio and onboard electronics. For me, there's fun to it, seeing and watching how things work. Sure, sometimes, I feel like I want to go home. But most times, I am at home. The sea is my home away from home.

My Mum is from the Highlands, so my people don't get to see the sea that



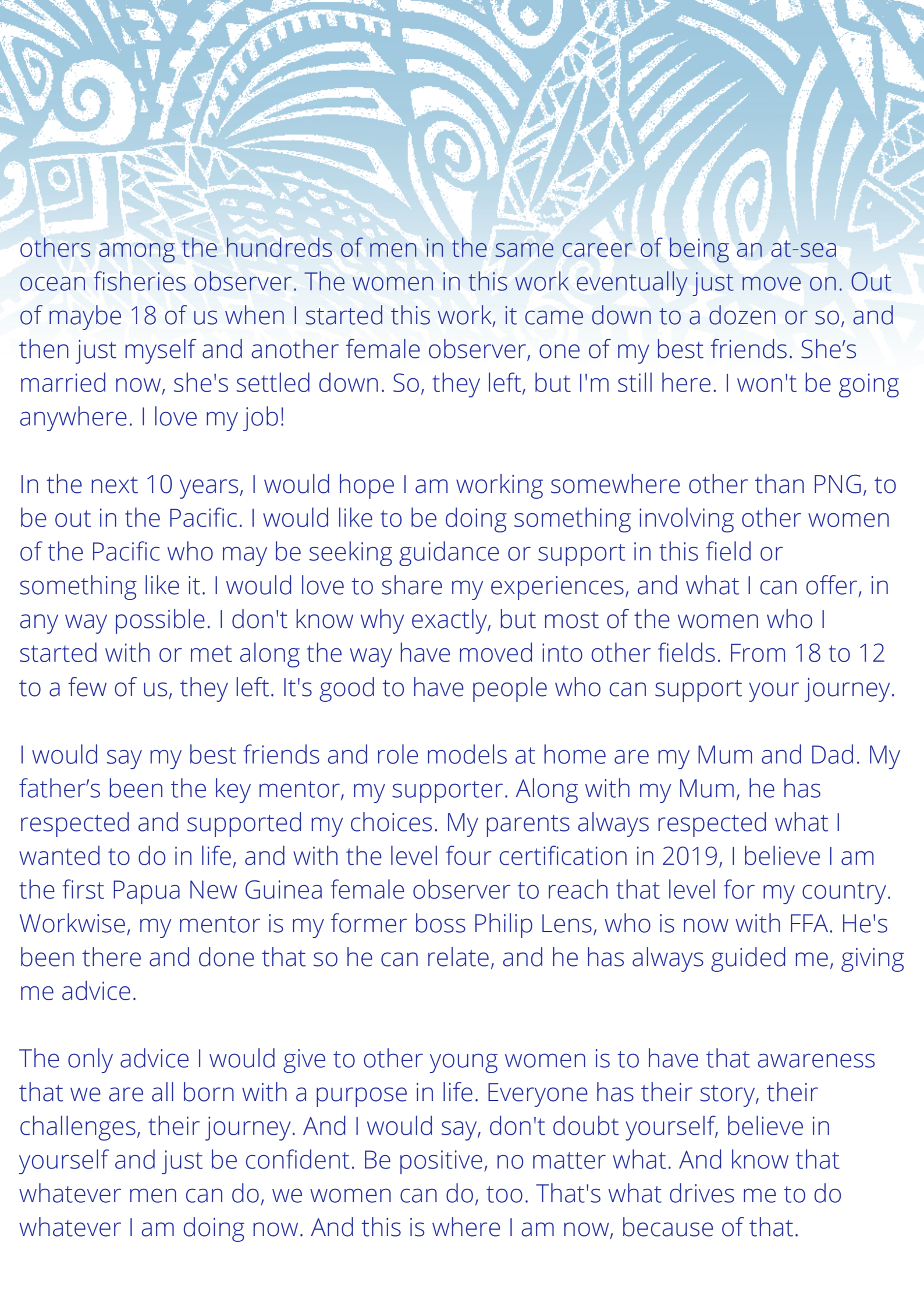
much. But I was born in West New Britain, in Kimbe. I grew there, and I learned how to swim there. And I had a lot of experiences in the coast, just being a young girl. But most of the time I was back in my Mum's place up in eastern Highlands, in Goroka. I grew up there. And once I got to be an observer, well, I knew the only thing I was confident in myself is that I knew how to swim. When I went for the first training and I passed, they said, "Now you are going to swim." I just said "Yes!"

The most beautiful thing I love about my work are the sunsets and the sunrises. I stay awake to see the sunrise and, I must be frank, we, the people out at sea, we see the most perfect, beautiful sunsets and sunrises compared to people on land. To see that big, round sun rising from the edge of the sea. To watch it go down and fire up the sky as it leaves another day behind. I just love that the most.

The most difficult part of being out at sea is getting used to being the only woman in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by men who are not your relatives, not your wantoks, and not your friends. You are there to do a job that they understand is going to show how good or how bad they are at compliance with the rules of fishing, and the best-case scenario is when they ignore you so you can watch them at work. You have to trust your intuition a lot, to know your plan B in case anyone forgets the rules that are in place to protect observers.

Trust doesn't come into it for me. As an observer, I am careful to avoid any situations that might flare up. I am there to observe and record. A visitor to a world where I don't speak the language and I am not male. I am on their boat, watching them at their place of work, and for many of them, an uninvited but necessary guest in their home.

I don't see many women in this line of work. I have only ever met maybe three



others among the hundreds of men in the same career of being an at-sea ocean fisheries observer. The women in this work eventually just move on. Out of maybe 18 of us when I started this work, it came down to a dozen or so, and then just myself and another female observer, one of my best friends. She's married now, she's settled down. So, they left, but I'm still here. I won't be going anywhere. I love my job!

In the next 10 years, I would hope I am working somewhere other than PNG, to be out in the Pacific. I would like to be doing something involving other women of the Pacific who may be seeking guidance or support in this field or something like it. I would love to share my experiences, and what I can offer, in any way possible. I don't know why exactly, but most of the women who I started with or met along the way have moved into other fields. From 18 to 12 to a few of us, they left. It's good to have people who can support your journey.

I would say my best friends and role models at home are my Mum and Dad. My father's been the key mentor, my supporter. Along with my Mum, he has respected and supported my choices. My parents always respected what I wanted to do in life, and with the level four certification in 2019, I believe I am the first Papua New Guinea female observer to reach that level for my country. Workwise, my mentor is my former boss Philip Lens, who is now with FFA. He's been there and done that so he can relate, and he has always guided me, giving me advice.

The only advice I would give to other young women is to have that awareness that we are all born with a purpose in life. Everyone has their story, their challenges, their journey. And I would say, don't doubt yourself, believe in yourself and just be confident. Be positive, no matter what. And know that whatever men can do, we women can do, too. That's what drives me to do whatever I am doing now. And this is where I am now, because of that.



# PROTECTING THE GLOBAL COMMONS: NGEDIKES OLAI ULUDONG

“The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea was a big step forward for our developing Pacific nations when it was agreed in the 1980s, but right now it’s even more important with the BBNJ negotiations to fill in gaps since it was adopted ... it can seem like a lot of UN-speak and negotiations, but it all comes down to the whole point of keeping our ocean home in order.”

Why is oceans work important for me? If one looks at my country’s (Palau) flag, that says it all. There are 193 flags at the United Nations for its members, and the only flag in the world that has a backdrop of an ocean with a full moon is Palau. For me, the ocean is firmly at the centre of who we are as a country and as a people. On an unfurled flag flying against a New York skyline, it is literally our highest statement of identity and ownership.

The ocean is our culture, our heritage, and our tradition; and in Palau we see that a healthy ocean is part of the birth right of every child. For these reasons, oceans work is at the centre of what I do here in New York as a United Nations ambassador. This work for a healthy, productive, and resilient ocean is especially





important now with major negotiations taking place at the UN, for example the work on a new treaty on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction [BBNJ]. And, having that flag at the UN with me keeps me grounded and reminded of why it's important.

And then there is the personal connection to seeing that flag. Back home in Palau, there is the traditional knowledge that every full moon, there's a known, predictable cycle and circle of renewal which links all life across land and sea. Every full moon, the fish spawn. It's a knowledge common across the Pacific small islands. The moon cycles affect ocean life, and how we harvest food from the ocean is part of our ancestral history. It's like carrying a library in our heads that has survived colonisation; it's separate from political agendas and is an important part of our lives even today. The connection between moon and tides and people is all tied up into who we are as coastal states and islanders.

As a livelihood resource for the world, the ocean is what drives me professionally. But that professional passion comes from a very deep and personal love for the sea.

Growing up, the ocean was literally my backyard. I loved to go to the rock islands, swimming in the ocean and fishing. Even now I still make a point when at home to go out and bottom-fish and get my dose of vitamin sea, because being in the ocean for me is very relaxing. It's my happy place. I love the way I feel when I'm in my blue ocean environment. It's both an energising and peaceful way to be.

And I dive because I believe when you go out in the world and talk about the oceans, you must know close-up what you are talking about and what you are working to protect. By the age of 30, I became a certified diver. And that allowed me to know truly what the depths of the ocean are like, not just the



view from the top. This defines my ocean work both personally and professionally.

That was my first love, even though my career began with climate change. I took an interest in climate change because of the impact it is having on oceans and marine life. I have a Master of Science and a postgraduate [qualification] in climate change, both from USP which I obtained after completing my undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice at the University of Guam and an Associate of Science degree as well. My daughter thinks I have too many degrees. She is probably right in this, as education can only take one so far and it is the experience that gets one further. This leads to when my work on environment straight into climate change and international diplomacy, doing work for Palau and the Pacific region before heading internationally.

Palau's very strong stance on illegal fishing is part of that legacy. In my personal view, there are two countries in the world that feel so strongly about illegal fishing in our waters that we seize and make a public point of burning these ships instead of simply sending them out of our waters. Palau and Indonesia have done this.

Burning boats is not looked upon favourably by the countries where these illegal boats come from, which underlines the stamina and leadership required by President Tommy Remengesau and Indonesia's former Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti. Burning or blowing up these ships stealing from our exclusive economic zones (EEZs) is what is needed to make a statement, because illegally plundering from within a nation's boundaries really robs the entire ocean.

Illegal fishing and rebalancing ocean governance are so important for Pacific nations and the world right now. This is a main reason I've taken on several roles beyond national responsibilities, such as serving as one of the co-






facilitators for the BBNJ treaty negotiations covering marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions, serving as a co-facilitator for the UN Ocean Conference political declaration, and as a member of the Group of Friends of the Ocean and Seas.

Because the fight for the future of our Pacific Ocean is a part of the fight for the future of all the world's oceans beyond the Pacific. Outside of every Pacific nation's EEZ is no man's territory, the high seas, and therefore very few rules on what you can and can't do. And yet fish and other marine migratory species know no borders, so we can't keep our work on sustainability to just our own EEZs.

So, how do you then produce that global framework to manage the common heritage of humanity? It's so important for our Pacific people to understand this critical work that's happening on the BBNJ and that process of protecting the global commons, the oceans, and high seas.

If you look at the Pacific Ocean from outer space, you will only see one body of water across the entire planet. There is no separation, and that global reality for our Blue Pacific really proves the scale of the task when it comes to managing what we have. We have the world's largest exclusive economic zones, but also the largest high seas areas on the planet, all within our Pacific Ocean.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea was a big step forward for our developing Pacific nations when it was agreed in the 1980s, but right now it's even more important with the BBNJ negotiations to fill in gaps since it was adopted. The biodiversity negotiations to set global targets for the next decade are also vitally important to support our national targets and encourage others to match our ambitions to protect and sustainably use the Blue Pacific.

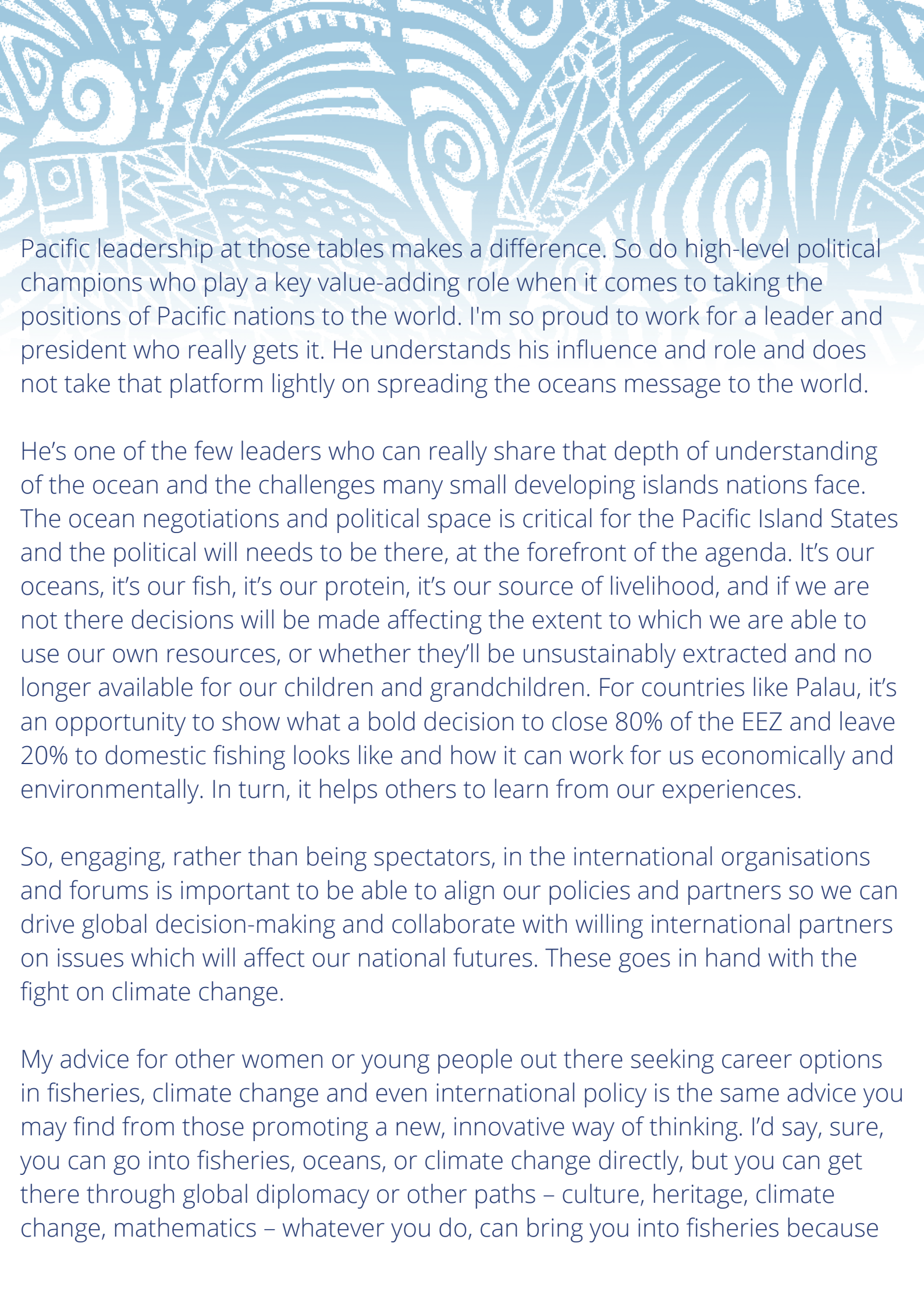


Often, it can seem like a lot of UN-speak and negotiations, but it all comes down to the whole point of keeping our ocean home in order. Because it's one thing for Palau to close 80% of its EEZ to fishing, as we're doing in the Palau National Marine Sanctuary. It's one thing to create marine protected areas and declare national marine parks. But if the world does not address what happens in the high seas, all the fishing boats just drop their lines on the edge of your EEZ and fish as much as they can. They love to come and fish on our borders because we are protecting and holding our ocean territories as safe ground—so the fish are thriving, and stocks are healthy – but they are on the move, being the migratory species that they are.

And there's no law to stop any fishing vessel from parking their vessels on our borders, using all the latest tech and radar gadgets to show them where the fish are, then putting down their thousands of kilometres of lines, and taking all they can. Because they can. This is the gap in international law. We are already seeing lots of that kind of activity.

I am also Palau's Ambassador to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and when it comes to their fisheries conferences, I sit in on negotiations, with fishing industry partners, and share our perspectives on all the dimensions of sustainable fisheries: aquaculture; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; on EEZs; and port state measures to deny port access to unscrupulous fishing fleets.

At the FAO table, in all the conversations around coastal and oceanic fisheries, we need our Pacific voices to be there. To talk about the importance of sustainable oceans, what's working in our fisheries and aquaculture systems, what needs fixing, and how the international community can and should support us.




Pacific leadership at those tables makes a difference. So do high-level political champions who play a key value-adding role when it comes to taking the positions of Pacific nations to the world. I'm so proud to work for a leader and president who really gets it. He understands his influence and role and does not take that platform lightly on spreading the oceans message to the world.

He's one of the few leaders who can really share that depth of understanding of the ocean and the challenges many small developing islands nations face. The ocean negotiations and political space is critical for the Pacific Island States and the political will needs to be there, at the forefront of the agenda. It's our oceans, it's our fish, it's our protein, it's our source of livelihood, and if we are not there decisions will be made affecting the extent to which we are able to use our own resources, or whether they'll be unsustainably extracted and no longer available for our children and grandchildren. For countries like Palau, it's an opportunity to show what a bold decision to close 80% of the EEZ and leave 20% to domestic fishing looks like and how it can work for us economically and environmentally. In turn, it helps others to learn from our experiences.

So, engaging, rather than being spectators, in the international organisations and forums is important to be able to align our policies and partners so we can drive global decision-making and collaborate with willing international partners on issues which will affect our national futures. These goes in hand with the fight on climate change.

My advice for other women or young people out there seeking career options in fisheries, climate change and even international policy is the same advice you may find from those promoting a new, innovative way of thinking. I'd say, sure, you can go into fisheries, oceans, or climate change directly, but you can get there through global diplomacy or other paths – culture, heritage, climate change, mathematics – whatever you do, can bring you into fisheries because



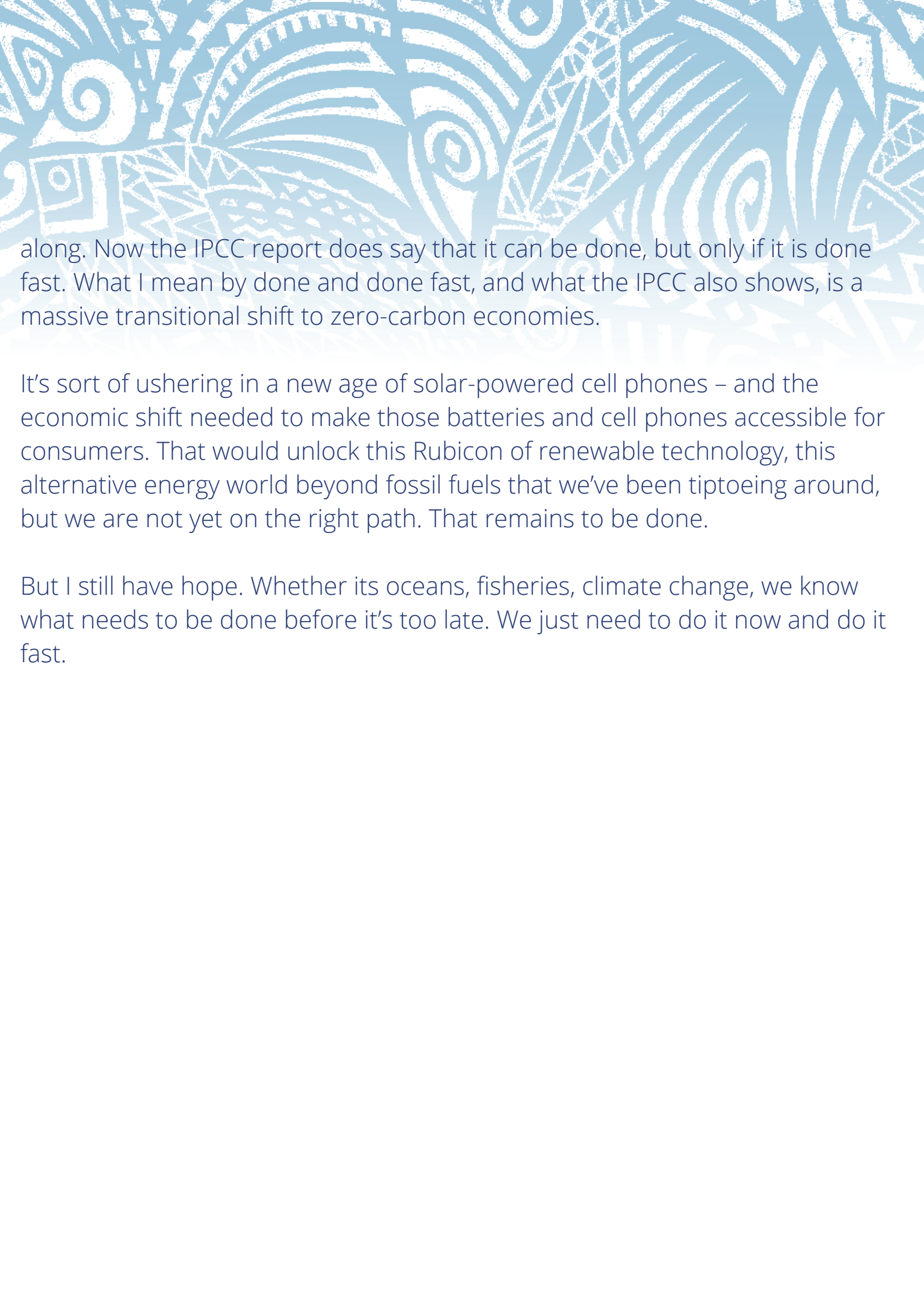


it's a social problem that needs all sorts of different skills and mindsets. Do come and join me! Oceans and climate are the new nexus that will shape the rest of the century, and no one knows them like we in the Pacific do. When it comes to climate, we have known it's been changing and the Paris Agreement target of keeping global warming to below 1.5 degrees has been our warning to the world: "1.5 to stay alive". When it comes to oceans and fish, we know something is wrong when we go fishing and find that those fish are not there in the numbers that they used to be.

And I say: come at fisheries (ocean) as an advocate for your countries and our region, too. Because our nations are all independent. We are some of the youngest independent nations in the world. Our leaders chose and struggled for that independence from years of colonial administration and external power and our futures being shaped by others who were far away and did not understand our lives, our identities, our desires. That alone should inspire more young women to understand what being independent means and fighting to keep that alive. Not just fighting for our islands, but for our ocean. Not just for tradition and your culture—but for the ocean and climate which supply the context for tradition and culture.

With the future of the planet and the oceans being so tied up in climate change, it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the gloomy news headlines and ignore the warning signs. I am aware of the warning signs, but it's not too late. There is hope. The sense of urgency for the Pacific has been what has given us impetus to fight for change and getting results. From Paris in 2015, when we had to battle hard for the stronger, more ambitious language we wanted on climate change, we got it, because we are living it. And we were able to show our partners that we were serious about this.

The IPCC report on 1.5 degrees in 2019 validated what we have been saying all



along. Now the IPCC report does say that it can be done, but only if it is done fast. What I mean by done and done fast, and what the IPCC also shows, is a massive transitional shift to zero-carbon economies.

It's sort of ushering in a new age of solar-powered cell phones – and the economic shift needed to make those batteries and cell phones accessible for consumers. That would unlock this Rubicon of renewable technology, this alternative energy world beyond fossil fuels that we've been tiptoeing around, but we are not yet on the right path. That remains to be done.

But I still have hope. Whether its oceans, fisheries, climate change, we know what needs to be done before it's too late. We just need to do it now and do it fast.

# MORE THAN A JOB: LATISHIA MAUI- MATAORA

“The excitement, the deadlines, the frustration, the people – the list goes on. Fisheries is not your usual 8 am to 4 pm government job. The work requires a radically different mindset because you are dealing with many moving parts, each with its own competing priorities. Just when you think you’ve gotten the hang of something, the obligations change, or new technology is rolled out requiring implementation ... Many think we count fish all day, but that’s far from the truth.”

I’ve been seven years in fisheries and am currently a senior fisheries officer and observer coordinator with the Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) in the Cook Islands. I had come from my studies in Auckland and a few years of working in high-performance sport and living the inner-city life with my husband. We had moved home to instil in our children the same cultural values we grew up with, and I was keen to explore a fitness or sports-oriented

start-up. Not to be. With a small island market not able to handle my big business dreams, I was soon needing a paying job, and ended up responding to a call for applicants from MMR, who were looking for an assistant fisheries officer to run the Vessel Management System.

On the day I was interviewed, I remember walking into the ministry







offices wondering what I was letting myself in for. I realised I knew nothing about the job title, and focused on just being me – keen to learn and take on new directions, happy to be back home, and giving back in a natural resource area that's so important for the country. I must have said something right, because I got the call a few days later offering me the job.

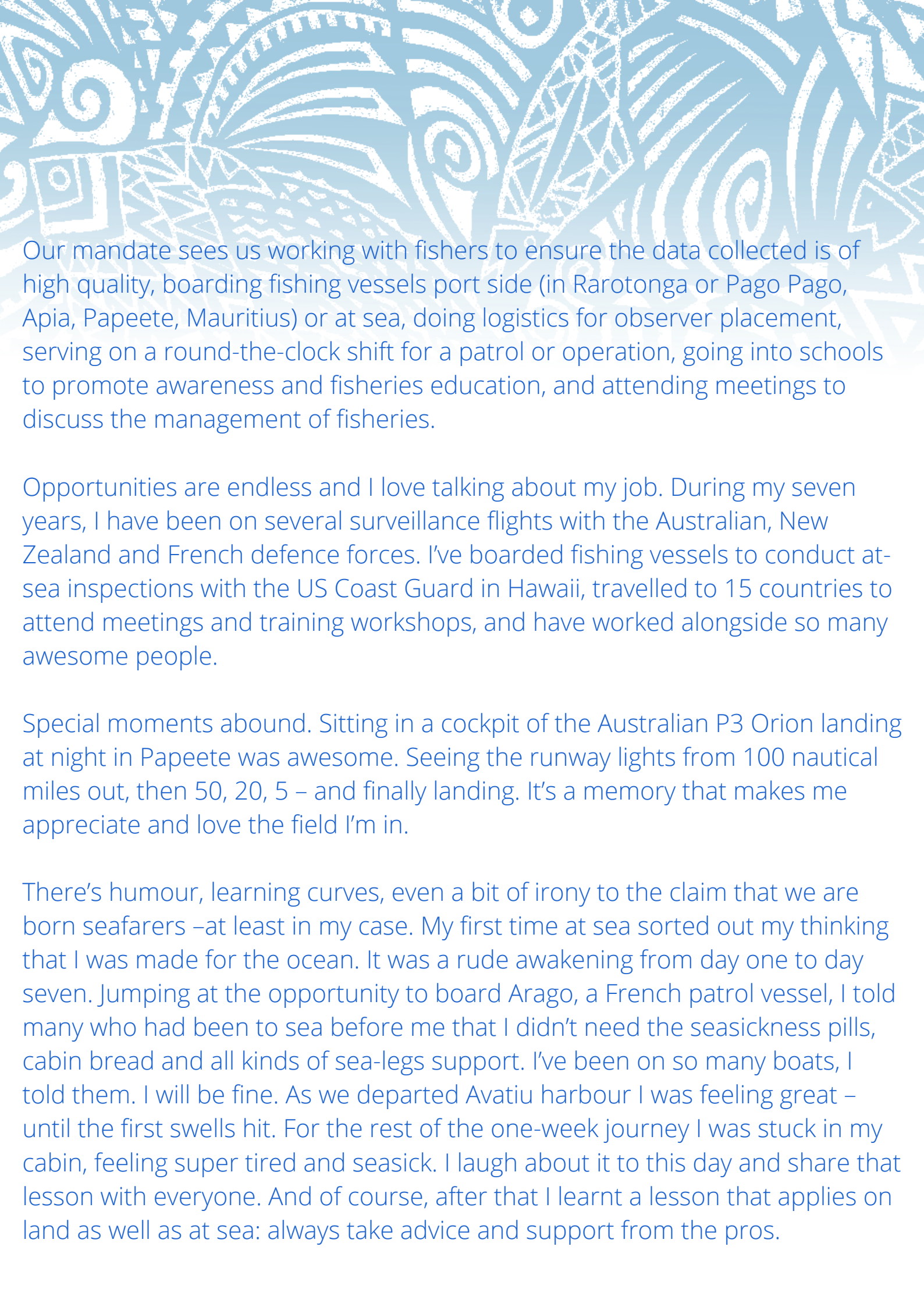
I have never looked back.

In seven years, I have learned so much about fisheries and our ocean resources. My primary role as the observer coordinator is to manage the Cook Islands Observer Programme, which deploys trained independent fisheries observers on fishing vessels licensed to fish within the Cook Islands exclusive economic zone, and Cook Islands-flagged vessels fishing in other regional fisheries areas.

Fisheries observers are frontline when it comes to our tuna. They are our eyes and ears out on the water. They collect scientific data used to monitor fisheries, assess fish populations, set fishing quotas, and inform management. Observers also support compliance with fishing and safety regulations.

I love the challenge! The excitement, the deadlines, the frustration, the people – the list goes on. Fisheries is not your usual 8 am to 4 pm government job. The work requires a radically different mindset because you are dealing with many moving parts, each with its own competing priorities. Just when you think you've gotten the hang of something, the obligations change, or new technology is rolled out requiring implementation. No day is the same at the office.

Most encounters start off with correcting the perception of fisheries officers and what we do. Many think we count fish all day, but that's far from the truth.

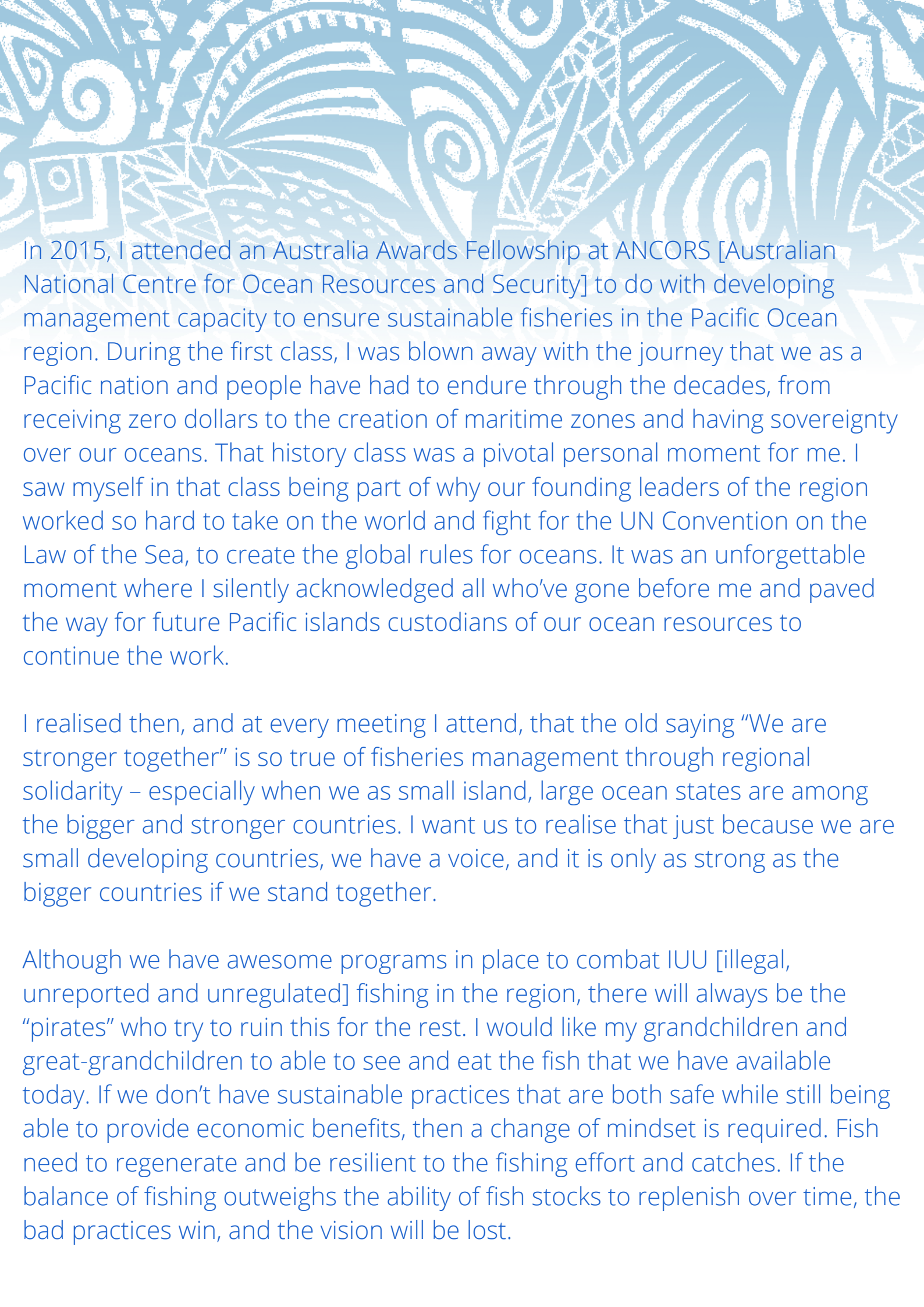


Our mandate sees us working with fishers to ensure the data collected is of high quality, boarding fishing vessels port side (in Rarotonga or Pago Pago, Apia, Papeete, Mauritius) or at sea, doing logistics for observer placement, serving on a round-the-clock shift for a patrol or operation, going into schools to promote awareness and fisheries education, and attending meetings to discuss the management of fisheries.

Opportunities are endless and I love talking about my job. During my seven years, I have been on several surveillance flights with the Australian, New Zealand and French defence forces. I've boarded fishing vessels to conduct at-sea inspections with the US Coast Guard in Hawaii, travelled to 15 countries to attend meetings and training workshops, and have worked alongside so many awesome people.

Special moments abound. Sitting in a cockpit of the Australian P3 Orion landing at night in Papeete was awesome. Seeing the runway lights from 100 nautical miles out, then 50, 20, 5 – and finally landing. It's a memory that makes me appreciate and love the field I'm in.

There's humour, learning curves, even a bit of irony to the claim that we are born seafarers –at least in my case. My first time at sea sorted out my thinking that I was made for the ocean. It was a rude awakening from day one to day seven. Jumping at the opportunity to board Arago, a French patrol vessel, I told many who had been to sea before me that I didn't need the seasickness pills, cabin bread and all kinds of sea-legs support. I've been on so many boats, I told them. I will be fine. As we departed Avatiu harbour I was feeling great – until the first swells hit. For the rest of the one-week journey I was stuck in my cabin, feeling super tired and seasick. I laugh about it to this day and share that lesson with everyone. And of course, after that I learnt a lesson that applies on land as well as at sea: always take advice and support from the pros.

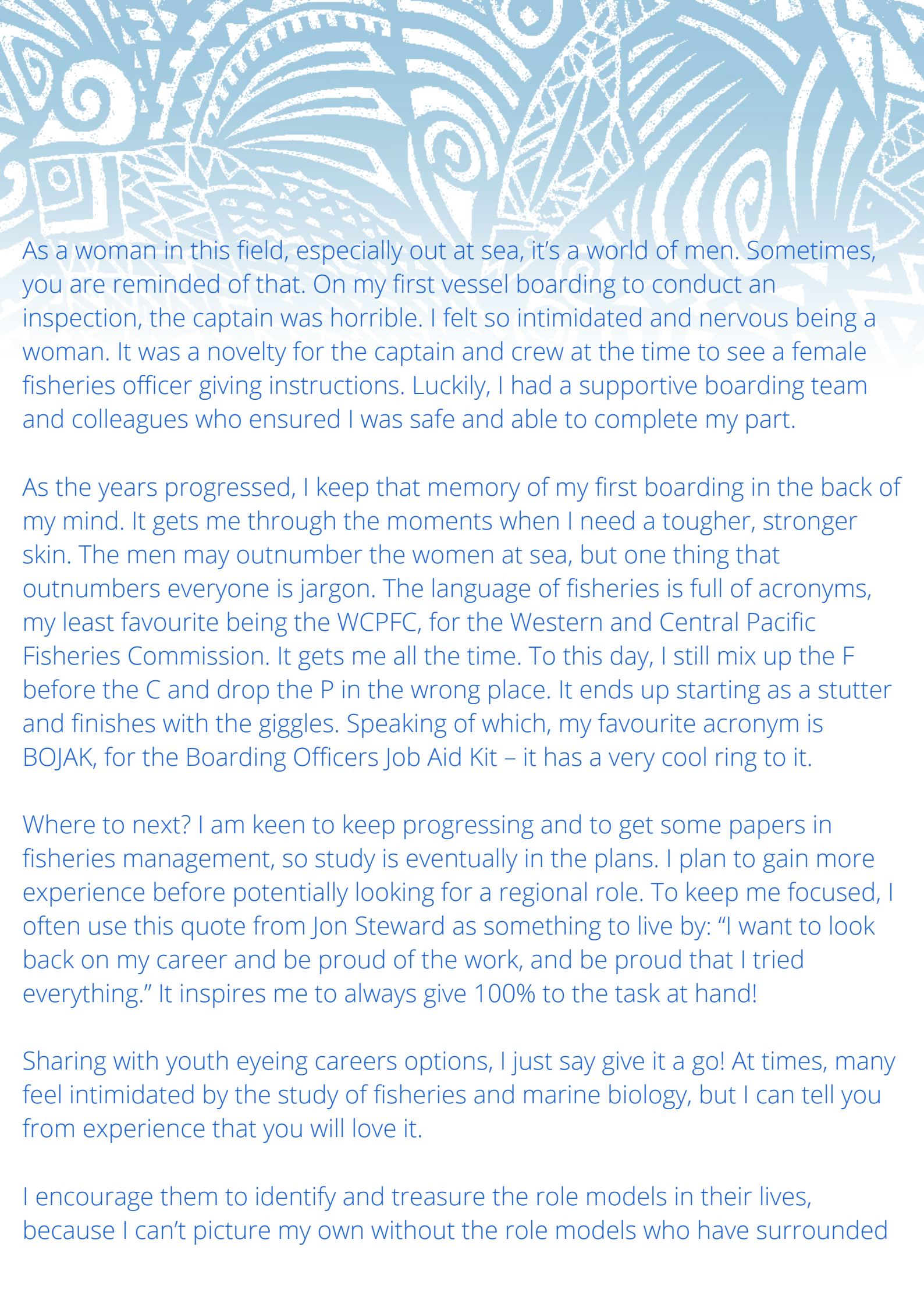


In 2015, I attended an Australia Awards Fellowship at ANCORS [Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security] to do with developing management capacity to ensure sustainable fisheries in the Pacific Ocean region. During the first class, I was blown away with the journey that we as a Pacific nation and people have had to endure through the decades, from receiving zero dollars to the creation of maritime zones and having sovereignty over our oceans. That history class was a pivotal personal moment for me. I saw myself in that class being part of why our founding leaders of the region worked so hard to take on the world and fight for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to create the global rules for oceans. It was an unforgettable moment where I silently acknowledged all who've gone before me and paved the way for future Pacific islands custodians of our ocean resources to continue the work.

I realised then, and at every meeting I attend, that the old saying “We are stronger together” is so true of fisheries management through regional solidarity – especially when we as small island, large ocean states are among the bigger and stronger countries. I want us to realise that just because we are small developing countries, we have a voice, and it is only as strong as the bigger countries if we stand together.

Although we have awesome programs in place to combat IUU [illegal, unreported and unregulated] fishing in the region, there will always be the “pirates” who try to ruin this for the rest. I would like my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to be able to see and eat the fish that we have available today. If we don't have sustainable practices that are both safe while still being able to provide economic benefits, then a change of mindset is required. Fish need to regenerate and be resilient to the fishing effort and catches. If the balance of fishing outweighs the ability of fish stocks to replenish over time, the bad practices win, and the vision will be lost.





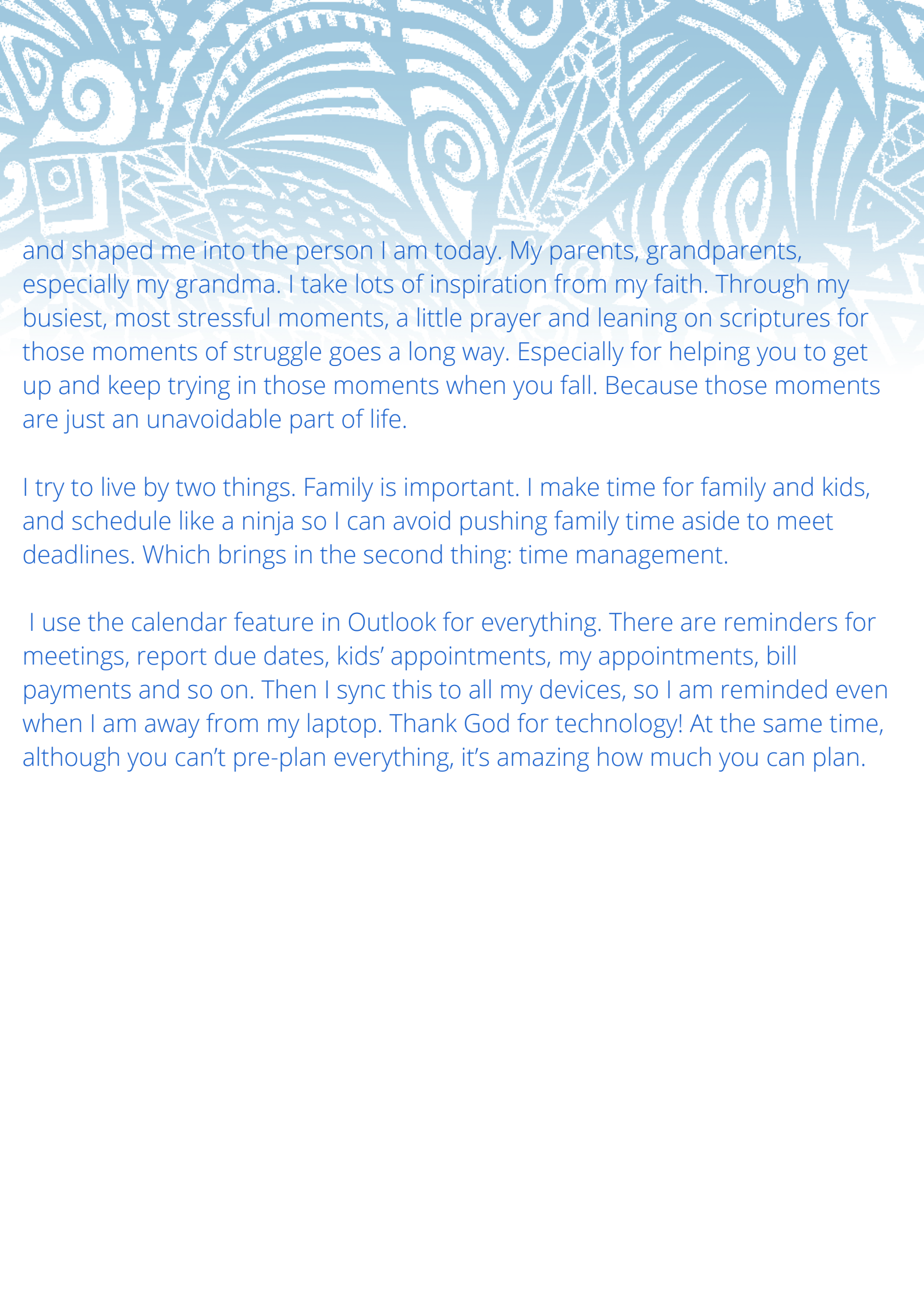
As a woman in this field, especially out at sea, it's a world of men. Sometimes, you are reminded of that. On my first vessel boarding to conduct an inspection, the captain was horrible. I felt so intimidated and nervous being a woman. It was a novelty for the captain and crew at the time to see a female fisheries officer giving instructions. Luckily, I had a supportive boarding team and colleagues who ensured I was safe and able to complete my part.

As the years progressed, I keep that memory of my first boarding in the back of my mind. It gets me through the moments when I need a tougher, stronger skin. The men may outnumber the women at sea, but one thing that outnumbers everyone is jargon. The language of fisheries is full of acronyms, my least favourite being the WCPFC, for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. It gets me all the time. To this day, I still mix up the F before the C and drop the P in the wrong place. It ends up starting as a stutter and finishes with the giggles. Speaking of which, my favourite acronym is BOJAK, for the Boarding Officers Job Aid Kit – it has a very cool ring to it.

Where to next? I am keen to keep progressing and to get some papers in fisheries management, so study is eventually in the plans. I plan to gain more experience before potentially looking for a regional role. To keep me focused, I often use this quote from Jon Steward as something to live by: "I want to look back on my career and be proud of the work, and be proud that I tried everything." It inspires me to always give 100% to the task at hand!

Sharing with youth eyeing careers options, I just say give it a go! At times, many feel intimidated by the study of fisheries and marine biology, but I can tell you from experience that you will love it.

I encourage them to identify and treasure the role models in their lives, because I can't picture my own without the role models who have surrounded



and shaped me into the person I am today. My parents, grandparents, especially my grandma. I take lots of inspiration from my faith. Through my busiest, most stressful moments, a little prayer and leaning on scriptures for those moments of struggle goes a long way. Especially for helping you to get up and keep trying in those moments when you fall. Because those moments are just an unavoidable part of life.

I try to live by two things. Family is important. I make time for family and kids, and schedule like a ninja so I can avoid pushing family time aside to meet deadlines. Which brings in the second thing: time management.

I use the calendar feature in Outlook for everything. There are reminders for meetings, report due dates, kids' appointments, my appointments, bill payments and so on. Then I sync this to all my devices, so I am reminded even when I am away from my laptop. Thank God for technology! At the same time, although you can't pre-plan everything, it's amazing how much you can plan.

# LAUGHING OUT LOUD: 'ANA FINAU TAHOLO

"My late father lived by this Tongan phrase while raising us: 'Koe sipinga 'oe mo'ui, faka'aki'aki mui' – a call to all that no matter how much you achieve and are successful in life, stay humble. It's a reminder to me to stay grounded, and I think surrounding yourself with good, grounding people is a great way to live those words."

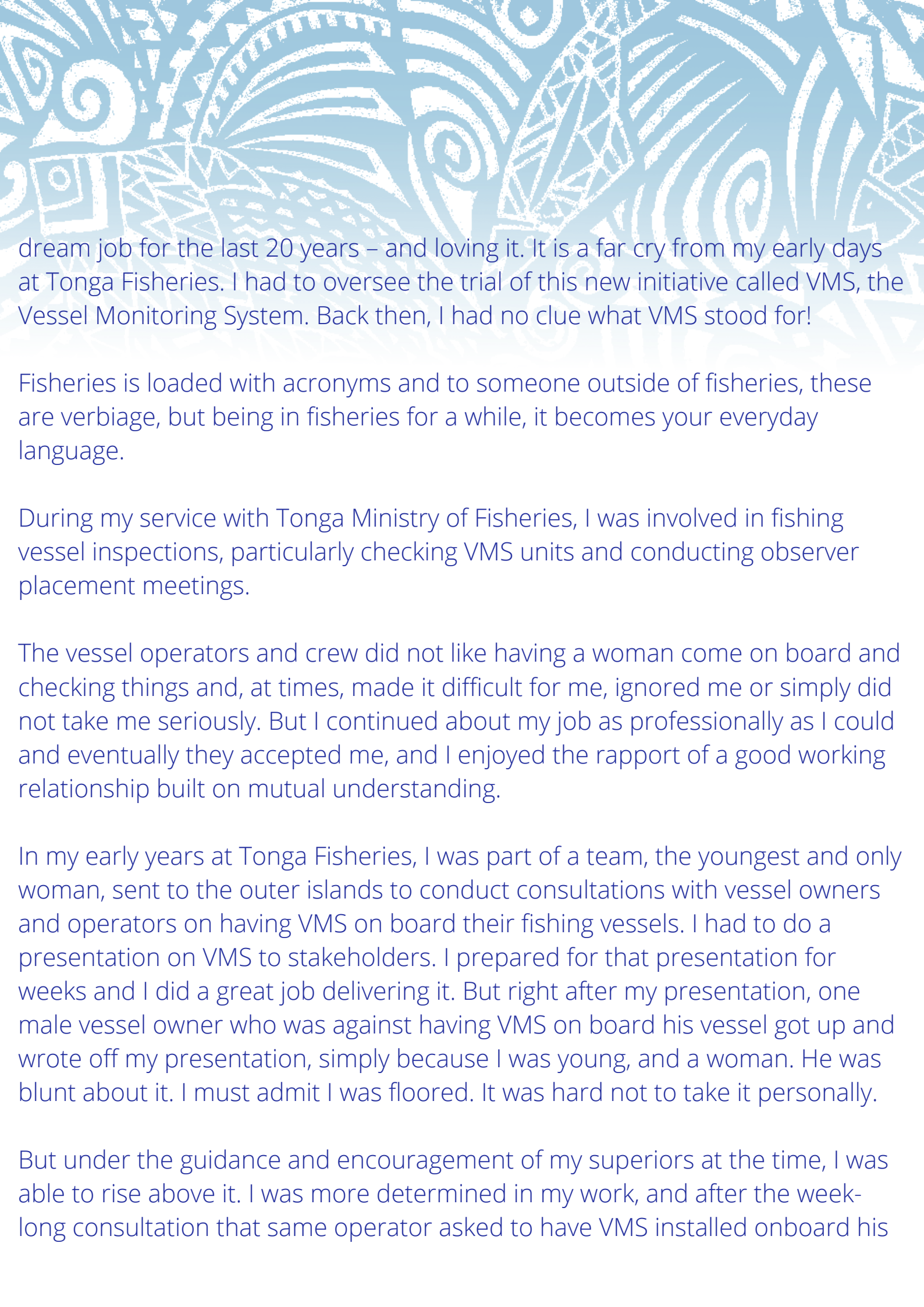
If you had told me in 1997 when I started my first job with a fishing company in Tonga called Sea Star Fishing, that by 2020, I would be the assistant compliance manager at the Pacific Tuna Commission in Micronesia for seven years, and about to take up a new job with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in the Solomon Islands, I would have laughed out loud.

At the time I was in stepping-stone mode, using the opportunity to get me to the next level towards my dream job, and for the 20-something me, that was definitely not fishing! While at high school in Tonga and even into my university years, I fancied, among other things, becoming a writer.

Shortly after joining Sea Star, I was awarded a study scholarship bonded to the Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, so grabbed that opportunity for further education, thinking I was still on track towards finding something better and landing my dream role. Fast forward to 2020 and I have been living the







dream job for the last 20 years – and loving it. It is a far cry from my early days at Tonga Fisheries. I had to oversee the trial of this new initiative called VMS, the Vessel Monitoring System. Back then, I had no clue what VMS stood for!

Fisheries is loaded with acronyms and to someone outside of fisheries, these are verbiage, but being in fisheries for a while, it becomes your everyday language.

During my service with Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, I was involved in fishing vessel inspections, particularly checking VMS units and conducting observer placement meetings.

The vessel operators and crew did not like having a woman come on board and checking things and, at times, made it difficult for me, ignored me or simply did not take me seriously. But I continued about my job as professionally as I could and eventually they accepted me, and I enjoyed the rapport of a good working relationship built on mutual understanding.

In my early years at Tonga Fisheries, I was part of a team, the youngest and only woman, sent to the outer islands to conduct consultations with vessel owners and operators on having VMS on board their fishing vessels. I had to do a presentation on VMS to stakeholders. I prepared for that presentation for weeks and I did a great job delivering it. But right after my presentation, one male vessel owner who was against having VMS on board his vessel got up and wrote off my presentation, simply because I was young, and a woman. He was blunt about it. I must admit I was floored. It was hard not to take it personally.

But under the guidance and encouragement of my superiors at the time, I was able to rise above it. I was more determined in my work, and after the week-long consultation that same operator asked to have VMS installed onboard his



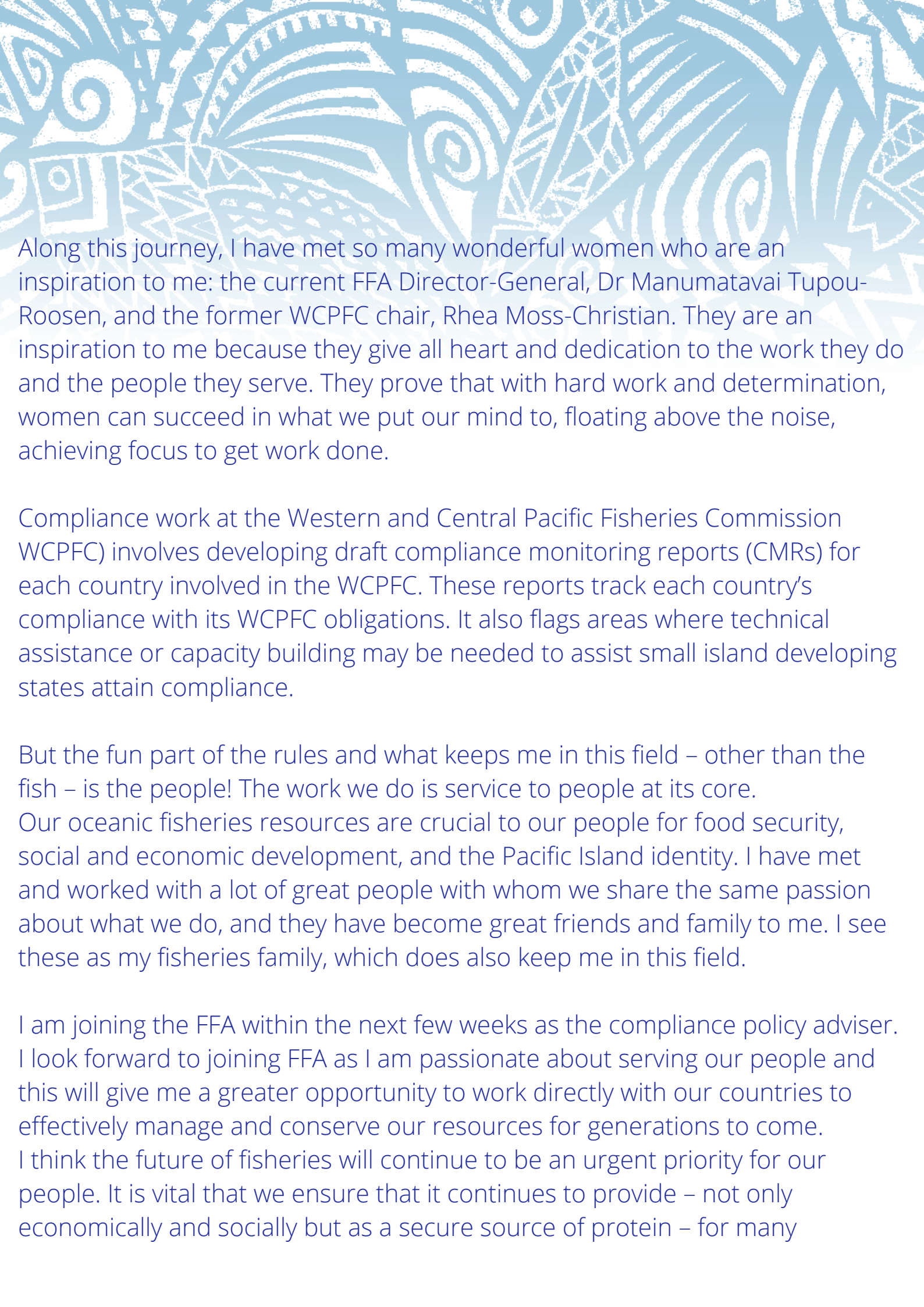
vessel – and to be trained along with others on the use of the VMS software to track their boat while out at sea.

Fisheries is a male-dominated area, especially when I started about 20 years ago. The first regional meeting I attended was the Forum Fisheries Agency's 7th working group on monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) in 2004, in Madang, Papua New Guinea. I was one of a handful of women at that meeting. So, it is very pleasing to see more women in fisheries nowadays and especially in leadership roles.

Fisheries is often seen as a blue-collar job and not for women. But I tell people, especially youth, that there are a lot of exciting opportunities in fisheries. It may be challenging, especially in an area where it is male-dominated, but that just means we must work harder and smarter. Young people love to travel, so I often use that as an enticement: that a career in fisheries can take you places where you meet different people.

My parents taught me the value of hard work, perseverance and humility, and my late father lived by this Tongan phrase while raising us: "Koe sipinga 'oe mo'ui, faka'aki'aki mui" – a call to all that no matter how much you achieve and are successful in life, stay humble. It's a reminder to me to stay grounded, and I think surrounding yourself with good, grounding people is a great way to live those words.

It has helped me connect with mentors who've helped me navigate the complicated but exciting world of fisheries. The compliance manager at North Pacific Fisheries Commission, Peter Flewwelling, and the late Colin Brown of the Cook Islands gave me so much of their time and mentored me in my early years when I joined fisheries. It helped solidify my interest in fisheries and my decision to stay with fisheries as the dream career.



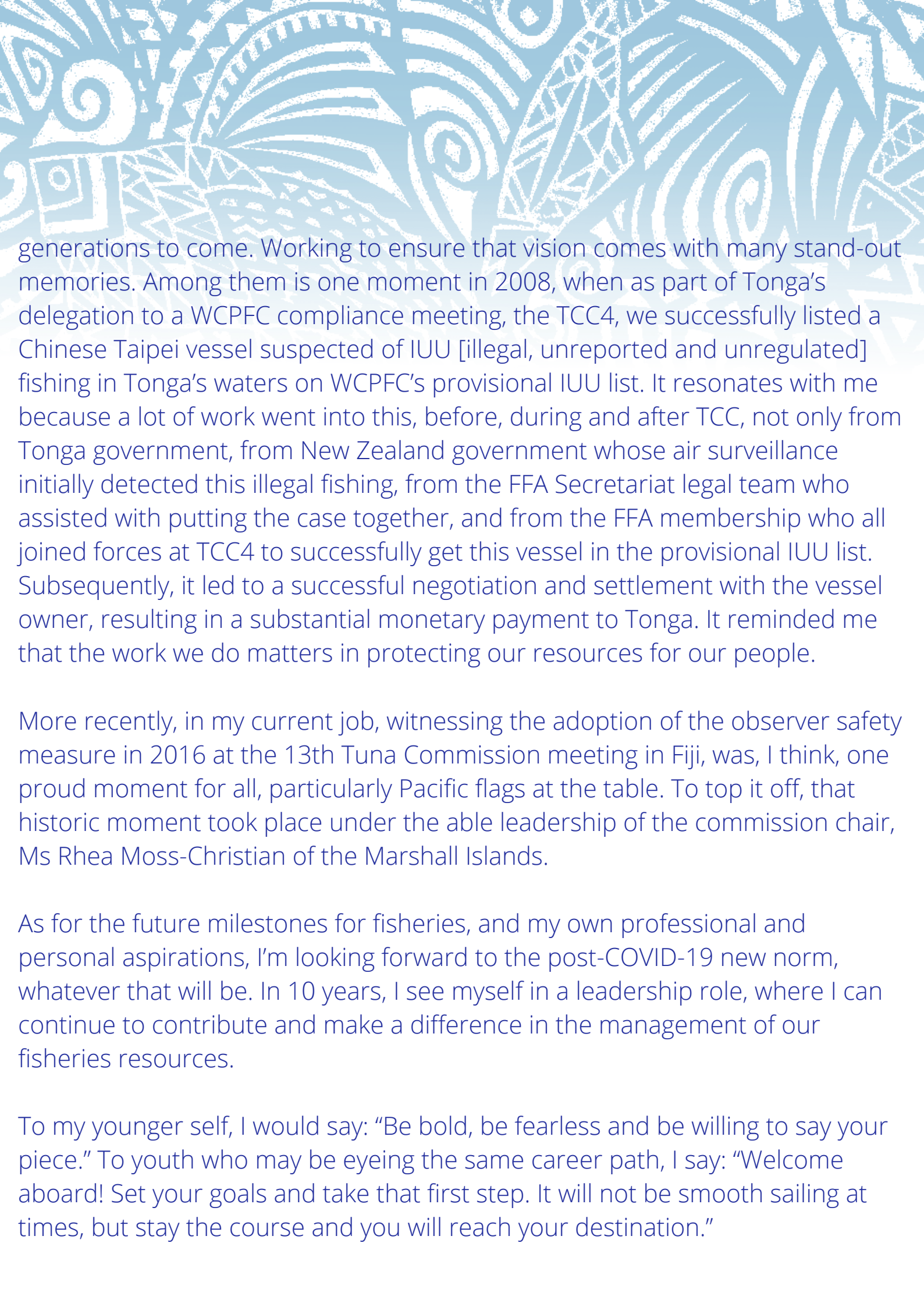
Along this journey, I have met so many wonderful women who are an inspiration to me: the current FFA Director-General, Dr Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen, and the former WCPFC chair, Rhea Moss-Christian. They are an inspiration to me because they give all heart and dedication to the work they do and the people they serve. They prove that with hard work and determination, women can succeed in what we put our mind to, floating above the noise, achieving focus to get work done.

Compliance work at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) involves developing draft compliance monitoring reports (CMRs) for each country involved in the WCPFC. These reports track each country's compliance with its WCPFC obligations. It also flags areas where technical assistance or capacity building may be needed to assist small island developing states attain compliance.

But the fun part of the rules and what keeps me in this field – other than the fish – is the people! The work we do is service to people at its core. Our oceanic fisheries resources are crucial to our people for food security, social and economic development, and the Pacific Island identity. I have met and worked with a lot of great people with whom we share the same passion about what we do, and they have become great friends and family to me. I see these as my fisheries family, which does also keep me in this field.

I am joining the FFA within the next few weeks as the compliance policy adviser. I look forward to joining FFA as I am passionate about serving our people and this will give me a greater opportunity to work directly with our countries to effectively manage and conserve our resources for generations to come. I think the future of fisheries will continue to be an urgent priority for our people. It is vital that we ensure that it continues to provide – not only economically and socially but as a secure source of protein – for many





generations to come. Working to ensure that vision comes with many stand-out memories. Among them is one moment in 2008, when as part of Tonga's delegation to a WCPFC compliance meeting, the TCC4, we successfully listed a Chinese Taipei vessel suspected of IUU [illegal, unreported and unregulated] fishing in Tonga's waters on WCPFC's provisional IUU list. It resonates with me because a lot of work went into this, before, during and after TCC, not only from Tonga government, from New Zealand government whose air surveillance initially detected this illegal fishing, from the FFA Secretariat legal team who assisted with putting the case together, and from the FFA membership who all joined forces at TCC4 to successfully get this vessel in the provisional IUU list. Subsequently, it led to a successful negotiation and settlement with the vessel owner, resulting in a substantial monetary payment to Tonga. It reminded me that the work we do matters in protecting our resources for our people.

More recently, in my current job, witnessing the adoption of the observer safety measure in 2016 at the 13th Tuna Commission meeting in Fiji, was, I think, one proud moment for all, particularly Pacific flags at the table. To top it off, that historic moment took place under the able leadership of the commission chair, Ms Rhea Moss-Christian of the Marshall Islands.

As for the future milestones for fisheries, and my own professional and personal aspirations, I'm looking forward to the post-COVID-19 new norm, whatever that will be. In 10 years, I see myself in a leadership role, where I can continue to contribute and make a difference in the management of our fisheries resources.

To my younger self, I would say: "Be bold, be fearless and be willing to say your piece." To youth who may be eyeing the same career path, I say: "Welcome aboard! Set your goals and take that first step. It will not be smooth sailing at times, but stay the course and you will reach your destination."



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