Special issue
This is a special issue of the ECOPAS Newsletter concentrating on the 10th conference for the European Society for Oceanists (ESfO), held in Brussels in June of this year. While this is the biennial conference for ESfO, this year it also featured as the closing conference for the ECOPAS project. The conference was greatly attended by Pacific scholars from all over the world, as well as representatives from the EU. This issue is edited by Eilin Holtan Torgersen, and written by Toon van Meijl and Eilin Holtan Torgersen.

Europe and the Pacific
10th ESfO Conference held in Brussels, 24-27 June 2015

The 10th ESfO Conference, organized by ECOPAS partner Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies from Radboud University Nijmegen, and co-funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (Gr. CONF-693), was one of the most successful ESfO conferences so far. The theme of the conference – Europe and the Pacific – generated wide interest from the outset. Over the four days, the uniqueness and diversity of the Pacific region was explored, debated and celebrated. Engagements between Europe and the Pacific in past and present were discussed in a variety of dimensions, ranging from colonial relations, contemporary legal-political relations, trade relations, sustainable development programmes, humanitarian aid, new migrations patterns, and tourism, to environmental concerns and widespread anxiety about the impact of climate change. Many presentations testified to the strength of the Pacific region and the cultural creativity of Pacific peoples in developing alternative future orientations to contemporary global challenges. We were reminded that the problems to be addressed and the questions to be raised in the examination of the multitude of alternatives that the Pacific is offering to the global community are far from simple.

Opening ceremony in Brussels City Hall

The opening ceremony of the conference was held in the Gothic Room of the old City Hall of Brussels, for which special permission was granted by the Mayor of Brussels. We welcomed 280 participants from more than 20 different countries and nations, with a significant number from the Pacific region, including Samoa, Hawaii, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Included in the audience were also 43 delegates from Australia, 24 from New Zealand and 22 from the United States.
This roundtable discussion, organised by ECOPAS, with officials representing the European Union and Pacific ambassadors stationed in Brussels, was focused around future connections between Europe and the Pacific. The roundtable was chaired by ECOPAS Work Package Leader Dr. Tony Crook (University of St. Andrews), and involved participants such as H.E. Fatumanava III Dr. Pa’olelei Luteru, Ambassador of Samoa; EEAS representative Stefan Forester; H.E. Joe Kalinoe, Ambassador of Papua New Guinea; and Pacific policy specialist Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi. At this roundtable, the principles and new regional initiatives emerging from recent reviews of development policies in the Pacific were discussed in conjunction with the challenges to current paradigms of development cooperation, and the concerns and priorities of the Pacific region.
As a special treat of the conference artists from the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices on 25 June performed Moana: the Rising of the Sea to all conference attendants, as well as representatives from the EU and from Pacific Embassies in Brussels. The performance was held at the large and technologically advanced Viage Theatre, and was the last of a series of performances during Moana’s four-week tour of Europe. Moana was also performed on 23 June in the European Parliament to members and staff, Comission representatives and diplomats prior to this performance, during which the Pacific artists conveyed a powerful message, even without the support of a sound and light system. Moana: the Rising of the Sea, a show of dance, song, music and film is produced by ECOPAS and the University of the South Pacific’s Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies. Written, directed and performed by Pacific Islanders, Moana is an intense declaration of love to the natures and cultures of the Pacific, and a call for the world to think and act in these challenging times for Oceania. After the Brussels performances a request has come from the EU that Moana should be showcased at the COP21-meeting in Paris in December 2015. For updates on future shows, please visit the Moana web page at www.moana.b.uib.no.

Closing Roundtable Discussion: The interface between research and policy for improving connections between Europe and the Pacific

Another roundtable discussion organised by ECOPAS concerned the interface between research and policy and the implications for improving connections between Europe and the Pacific. This panel focused on possible paths for building long-term research cooperation and dialogue between European and Pacific scholars and policy makers, with a special focus on the goal of ECOPAS to reinforce the interface between research and policy. This panel was chaired by Professor Toon van Meijl, chair of ESfO and leader of WP6 in the ECOPAS project, and featured Joeli Veitayaki (WP4), Philippe Keraudren (DG-RTD), Laurent Dousset (WP2), Margaret Jolly (Chair of the ECOPAS Scientific Advisory Board), Tony Crook (WP3) and Edvard Hviding (ECOPAS Coordinator). A plenary discussion with the ESfO membership concluded the roundtable.

Moana: the Rising of the Sea

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During the conference, the New Zealand Māori sculptor and ESfO resident artist George Nuku worked on his project Bottled Ocean 2115 in the lobby of the Thon Hotel, where he made a floating island and a canoe of plexiglass. He attempted to capture a near future scenario of the contemporary world that is not only undergoing a radical transformation through the over-exploitation of fossil fuels, but in which plastic now also permeates life on earth on every level.