

## AFRAN Forum 2020

### Welcome address, by UNC President GAEL LAGADEC

Dear AFRAN President, chère Katherine

His Excellency French Ambassador in Australia,

Her Excellency Consul-General of Australia in New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis et Futuna, dear Alison,

M. le DTRT,

Dear SPC Director General,

Dear Colleagues from the Higher education, research and innovation CRESICA Consortium in New Caledonia,

Dear French Polynesian colleagues,

Dear all,

- Together with all my colleagues of the research institutes in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and on behalf of the CRESICA consortium, I am **extremely delighted to host** the 2020 AFRAN Forum on UNC Campus tonight **and to actively contribute** to the launch of the AFRAN Pacific Hub that we are officially installing altogether today.
- To me, this event comes as **one of many tangible signs** that illustrate the powerful dynamics at stake in our French Pacific Territories in terms of **enhanced regional engagement**.
- This 2020 Forum **also confirms**, on the ground, **Australian university community's interest** in strengthening bounds with their French Pacific counterparts, which I see both as very **exciting and timely**.
- Furthermore, from our perspective, this nicely comes as **a practical follow up of our** involvement in the Joint Science and Innovation meeting that took place in Canberra in February 2019.
- **It seems we've made a point there (!)** stressing the **utmost relevance of embarking French Pacific research institutions in the French Australian bilateral cooperation agenda**, especially when it comes to addressing indo-pacific challenges.

- Pacific engagement is the backbone of our New Caledonian higher education and research strategy. Various building blocks have been put in place over the past 8 years:
  - The establishment of the Pacific Island Universities Research Network (PIURN), currently co-chaired by the UNC and the University of the South Pacific in Fiji;
  - Our support to the recent establishment of the National University of Vanuatu;
  - The award in 2019 of the FALAH European project on food security and health in the Pacific, together with Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Australia, and now PNG;
  - The on-going co-design of a Bachelor degree on environment in Vanuatu, together with James Cook University (JCU);
  - Tomorrow, the opening of the first regional master degree on environment, together with the University of French Polynesia, and the University of the South Pacific;
  - On a longer term, the project of opening a full regional master degree on SDGs.
  
- In addition, thanks to the New Colombo Plan, to the Pacific Fund scheme, to AFRAN and Embassy funding instruments, we can see now:
  - Increasing bilateral mobility of undergraduate students between New Caledonia and Australia;
  - Scaled-up joint projects leading to greater strategic cooperation between institutions (I can refer here to the UNC relations with JCU, with Griffith university, with Sydney university, only to name a few);
  - A growing number of students engaging in research mobility (either through a research internship at Bachelor or Master levels, or in the context of joint-supervision or PhD co-tutelle).
  
- I am firmly convinced the AFRAN Pacific hub can **empower our researchers, and give them new possibilities** for expanding their connexions with Australian colleagues.

Our long-term ambition is then to deepen our strategic capacity to jointly address regional challenges with Australian Universities, for the direct benefit of the Pacific future generations.

Thank you very much for your attention.