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Commission on Sustainable Development 16th session, 12 May 2008

SIDS Day

Statement by Ms Joanna Hewitt

Head of the Australian delegation to the
16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

(Check against delivery)

Mr / Madam Chair

SIDS day is an important and integral element of the Commission's activities, and none more so than during this year's deliberations.

We listened carefully to the intervention delivered by the distinguished representative of the Kingdom of Tonga on behalf of our Pacific Island neighbours during last Friday's session on 'interlinkages'. The statement emphasised the particular relevance for the region of this CSD cycle of themes given that the majority of the population in the Pacific relies mainly on agriculture, forestry and fisheries as its primary source of livelihood and food. We therefore welcome the opportunity to address the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy in the context of the CSD-16 themes of rural development, agriculture, land management, drought and desertification.

Mr/Madam Chair

Australia fully supports the Barbados Program of Action (BPOA) and the Mauritius Strategy for its Implementation (MSI) as important frameworks for promoting the sustainable development of small island developing states (SIDS), particularly in the Pacific Island countries (PICs). The Barbados and Mauritius frameworks have been integrated into Australia's overseas development assistance programs, resulting in a more active and robust policy approach to the SIDS in the Pacific.

Australia has a longstanding and enduring commitment to partnership with the SIDS in the Pacific. Our key objectives in the region are to promote political stability, sustainable economic development and regional co-operation. We have a clear interest in strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as these are fundamental to regional stability and development. And we are particularly keen to help ensure that our Pacific neighbours remain on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr /Madam Chair

There is no doubt that SIDS face myriad challenges in pursuing their own sustainable development, in particular proper management of limited land resources, increased urbanisation, and economic stresses posed by recent hikes in energy and food prices. Australia is giving high priority to initiatives to boost sustainable agriculture and forestry productivity in the Pacific, and has provided a wide range of assistance to enhance food security, particularly in resource-poor settings. For example, Australia's assistance in Solomon Islands focuses on improvements to critical agricultural services and forestry sector capacity building.

But as noted by our distinguished colleague from the Kingdom of Tonga on Friday, climate change is the cross-cutting issue for Pacific SIDS. Australia is no stranger to the impacts of climate change, and we acknowledge our responsibility to assist SIDS to adapt in the face of the serious challenges posed by climate change to the livelihoods of those living in small island developing states.

For example, Pacific Island Countries will be a priority focus under the government's \$150 million, three-year commitment to climate change adaptation. This initiative will respond to the needs articulated by partner country governments and will be consistent with our commitment to implementing the UNFCCC's Nairobi Work Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation.

Australia is deeply involved in the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, and the Climate Change and Southern Hemisphere Tropical Cyclones Project. We also provide significant support to the Pacific's regional organisations – such as the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and the Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) to assist Pacific Island Countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

More recently, in March 2008 the Prime Ministers of Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) announced the PNG-Australia Forest Carbon Partnership, which provides up to \$3 million for technical, scientific and analytical support for the design of PNG's carbon monitoring and accounting system. The partnership is also designed to foster cooperative approaches to reducing emissions from deforestation and to prepare PNG to participate in international carbon markets.

In these and other ways, Australia will continue to engage with small island developing states, drawing on our experience and technical capacities to assist them in meeting their sustainable development goals.

Thankyou Mr/Madam Chair.