



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

October 2020





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Introduction

This weekly update aims to highlight recent news on climate change, migration, and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

Prepared as a part of the CLI_M_CO2 project, undertaken at the World Trade Institute, University of Bern, Switzerland.

01-07 October 2020

Organisations update

SPREP

Tonga's Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) have developed a report on the state of the environment in the country. The report identifies Special Management Areas (SMAs) as a key indicator reflecting the efforts made by government agencies and local fisheries communities to proclaim their interests in utilizing marine resources, develop incentives to sustainably manage these resources, and recognize that adequate community engagement is essential for the effective management of fisheries.

The 'Tonga State of Environment Report 2018' (SOE Report), approved by the Tongan Government on 5 June 2020, uses the Drivers, Pressures, State, Impact and Response (DPSIR) model to describe the state of the environment in the country, and analyzes its most recent "conditions and grades" in relation to local and global goals. The 2018 SOE Report is the first of its kind for Tonga and is a key document for informing environmental planning and decision making in the country.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/report-reveals-positive-outcomes-of-tongas-special-management-areas-on-marine-environment>

PIFS

Pacific Trade officials have wrapped up a two-day virtual workshop on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement aimed at reinvigorating intra-regional and global trade post Covid-19.

In a workshop jointly supported by The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, more than 60 participants took part in virtual workshops on trade facilitation and regional integration, which was originally intended to have been held in Sydney in March 2020.

PIFS Director of Programmes and Initiatives Zarak Khan in opening formalities, noted trade facilitation is one of the five priorities included in the Pacific Aid-for-Trade Strategy 2020-2025.

"In the Pacific, COVID-19 has severely reduced frequency and reliability of air and sea freight services, thus adding additional challenges for a region which is already experiencing one of the highest transport costs in the world," he added.



The Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 was highlighted as a model for regional trade facilitation.

Trade Adviser at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Dr Salamat Ali and Ambassador Mere Falemaka of the Pacific Islands Forum-Geneva Office moderated the two-day virtual workshop.

Dr Ali noted the high costs of cross border trade to Pacific countries, due to the size of their economies and their relative isolation from major markets.

“It’s crucial to ensure logistics and operations at country borders are functioning seamlessly, so that the international trade continues smoothly to mitigate some of the adverse effect of Covid-19 pandemic”, Dr Ali said.

Global guest panellists joined discussions on the importance of well-functioning trade facilitation frameworks to mitigate the the disruptions on trade and global value chains while increasing the region’s overall competitiveness. Best practice examples of regional cooperation and trade facilitation were shared from the Caribbean region. Beyond regional approaches, the meeting reflected upon global opportunities for regionalism and resilience, such as the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), a global framework to modernize cross-border trade

The workshop continues momentum on a regional trade facilitation agenda for the Pacific, as a priority area in the Pacific Aid-for-Trade Strategy 2025, endorsed by Pacific Forum Trade Ministers in February 2020.

<https://www.forumsec.org/2020/10/09/pacific-islands-forum-commonwealth-joint-media-release-pacific-islands-officials-discuss-regional-trade-facilitation-approaches/>



08-14 October 2020

Organisations update

UNDRR

UNDRR report published to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on October 13, 2020, confirms how extreme weather events have come to dominate the disaster landscape in the 21st century. The statistics in this report are from the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) maintained by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) which records disasters which have killed ten or more people; affected 100 or more people; resulted in a declared state of emergency; or a call for international assistance.

In the period 2000 to 2019, there were 7,348 major recorded disaster events claiming 1.23 million lives, affecting 4.2 billion people (many on more than one occasion) resulting in approximately US\$2.97 trillion in global economic losses.

This is a sharp increase over the previous twenty years. Between 1980 and 1999, 4,212 disasters were linked to natural hazards worldwide claiming approximately 1.19 million lives and affecting 3.25 billion people resulting in approximately US\$1.63 trillion in economic losses.

Much of the difference is explained by a rise in climate-related disasters including extreme weather events: from 3,656 climate-related events (1980-1999) to 6,681 climate-related disasters in the period 2000-2019.

The last twenty years has seen the number of major floods more than double, from 1,389 to 3,254, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034. Floods and storms were the most prevalent events.

The report is available at: <https://www.undrr.org/publication/human-cost-disasters-overview-last-20-years-2000-2019>

ILO and IOM

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) signed an Agreement to create a framework for cooperation and collaboration to enhance the benefits of migration for all.

The framework includes joint support for improved migration governance, capacity building and policy coherence at national, regional and global levels. Other areas of work may also be developed.

The Agreement was signed by Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General, and António Vitorino, the IOM Director-General, on Friday at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva.



Speaking after the signing ceremony, Ryder said, "this Agreement seals an important alliance between our two organizations. Together, we will be stronger and more effective in both fulfilling our individual mandates and in collaborating on areas that are crucial for reshaping the world of work so that it is more inclusive, equitable and sustainable."

The new ILO-IOM Agreement builds on the agencies' comparative advantages, expertise, and respective constituencies. By encouraging joint initiatives, the Agreement aims to strengthen international migration governance and boost cooperation, capacity building and joint advocacy to promote migrants' rights and decent work opportunities.

<https://www.iom.int/news/ilo-and-iom-sign-agreement-strengthen-collaboration-migration-governance>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Fiji

A new messaging system has been launched in Fiji to ensure people can evacuate swiftly during natural disasters.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) launched its 'Find my Evacuation Centre' messaging system on Tuesday, saying disasters such as cyclones demanded a quick response of accurate information from the authorities to the public.

Director Vasiti Soko said the Short Message Service or SMS would be used to deliver communication to Fijians during disasters.

Soko said with the cyclone season on the horizon, the service would help people identify their nearest evacuation centre and also locate the nearest disaster management officials.

She said the messaging toolkit would also provide safety measures that can be followed during a disaster.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/428417/new-disaster-messaging-system-for-fiji>



15-22 October 2020

Organisations update

PIFS

Pacific COVID-19 recovery work has received a USD300,000 boost thanks to funding from the Republic of Korea (ROK). The funds are from the 2020 Republic of Korea – Pacific Islands Forum Cooperation Fund for trade and tourism promotion between Forum Island Countries and the Republic of Korea.

With the bulk of the 2020 ROK-PIF Cooperation Fund going towards climate prediction work and remote sensing surveillance for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, remaining funds are now tagged for a tourism and trade COVID-19 Recovery Project,

Tens of thousands of Pacific families have been directly and indirectly affected by the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, travel, and hospitality sectors. Forum Island countries highly dependent on tourism have lost between 30% – 40% of national incomes with Small and Medium Enterprise tourism businesses disproportionately affected.

“COVID-19 disruption across the Pacific has taken a huge economic toll across all industries in our member states, so this funding is welcome support to help pave the way for new trade and tourism opportunities between the Republic of Korea and the Forum Island Countries,” said Deputy Secretary General Dr. Filimon Manoni at the September 29 signing ceremony with HE Shinhee Cho, Ambassador for the Republic of Korea to Fiji.

The project, which will run to 2021, will include networking support for Pacific tour operators and Korean travel agents; development of a virtual trade portal; virtual meetings between Pacific exporters and Korean importers; and business development support for Pacific small and medium sized enterprises.

Project partners for this work with the Forum Secretariat include the Pacific Tourism Organisation and the Korean Importers Association.

<https://www.forumsec.org/2020/10/14/timely-boost-for-pacific-covid-19-recovery-from-korea-cooperation-fund/>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Marshall Islands



The continued bullying and intimidation tactics by China must stop, says a senior Marshall Islands official. The call comes amid revelations this week of a diplomatic stoush between staff from the Taiwan Trade Mission and the Chinese Embassy in Fiji.

A Taiwanese diplomat was hospitalised following an alleged altercation with the Chinese officials during the Taiwan national day event in Suva earlier this month.

The Marshall Islands is one of four Pacific island countries with diplomatic links to Taiwan

Its Ambassador to Fiji, Albon Ishoda, attended the function on 8 October but said he did not witness the incident.

Ishoda said he was even disappointed at China's presence at the event and "their claims their officials were provoked".

"It's borderline intimidation to anyone who wants to celebrate with the Taiwanese," he said.

"I just find it a bit of a nuisance that they being there sends perhaps some signals to whoever is attending that may care about how they view that."

Fiji's government said it has not received any communication from the Taiwan Office or the Chinese Embassy over the matter.

While Fiji is a long-time ally of Beijing, Taiwan has maintained a trade office in the capital.

Taipei has also sought to raise its profile by investing in education and agriculture.

Fiji police confirmed on Tuesday the Chinese embassy had lodged a complaint over an alleged assault on 8 October.

But the police statement did not mention Taiwan's grievances.

Police also said it would not be conducting further investigations as "the matter is now being handled at the diplomatic level as agreed to by all parties involved".

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/429016/marshall-islands-condemns-chinese-coercion-in-the-pacific>



23-31 October 2020

Organisations update

PIFS

Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers met with Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs today to plan for the 9th Japan Pacific Island Leaders Meeting (PALM) in 2021.

The 9th PALM will be the first meeting between Pacific leaders and Japan's new Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga.

With Forum Leaders due to head back to Japan for PALM 9, the virtual meeting on Tuesday evening (midday in Tokyo) reviewed progress on PALM 2018 outcomes and discussed future priorities for the PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) – Japan partnership.

Representing Tuvalu as Forum Chair, Communications, Justice and Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Simon Kofe noted the meeting covered "important progress and achievements that have been made since PALM 8."

In releasing the Chair's Summary of the meeting, Minister Kofe highlighted that "discussions covered many of the challenges facing our Blue Pacific, and, indeed, our broader global community. These include COVID-19, combatting climate change, ensuring the sustainable management and use of our oceans and stimulating sustainable and resilient development."

Minister Kofe encouraged greater collaboration and more future-focussed action to ensure PALM 8 commitments are met.

"It is my belief that meeting these commitments will set the course for a strong and impactful partnership as we move into the future," he said.

Thanking Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and the Government of Japan, Minister Kofe also thanked his fellow Forum Ministers, and Forum Leaders "for their ongoing commitment to regionalism, partnership, and strengthening our region in the Pacific way. This commitment has served to drive and safeguard the sustainable and resilient development of the Pacific."

Timed between PALM Leaders summits, the PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting reviews progress and sets the agenda for upcoming summits. The PALM is co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Japan and the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum and is attended by Forum Leaders. It has been held in Japan every three years since 1997. The last session, PALM 8, was held in Fukushima, Japan from 18 – 19 May 2018.

<https://www.forumsec.org/2020/10/20/japan-pacific-islands-forum-meet-ahead-of-2021-leaders-meeting/>



Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Pacific

With a 50th nation ratifying it, the treaty outlawing nuclear weapons for all countries will come into force in 90 days.

Nuclear weapons will soon be illegal. Just over 75 years since their devastation was first unleashed on the world, the global community has rallied to bring into force a ban through the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Late on Saturday night in New York, the 50th country – the central American nation of Honduras – ratified the treaty.

It will become international law in 90 days.

For many across the Pacific region, this is a momentous achievement and one that has been long called for. Over the second half of the 20th century 315 nuclear weapons tests were conducted by so-called “friendly” or colonising forces in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Australia and Maohi Nui (French Polynesia).

The United States, Britain and France used largely colonised lands to test their nuclear weapons, leaving behind not only harmful physical legacies but psychological and political scars as well.

Survivors of these tests and their descendants have continued to raise their voices against these weapons. They are vocal resisters and educators, the reluctant but intense knowledge holders of the nuclear reality of our region.

In the formation of the nuclear ban treaty, Pacific survivor voices were prominent alongside those of Hibakusha survivors from Japan.

Pacific islands were early adopters of the treaty. Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, New Zealand and Nauru have signed and ratified. Niue and Cook Islands have acceded.

Australia is notably absent, reflecting the vested interests of its alliance partner the United States, and a misplaced reliance on outdated and opaque doctrines of extended nuclear deterrence.

And the treaty is set to become law despite opposition from the five original nuclear powers, the US, Russia, China, Britain and France. The Trump administration has written to treaty signatories saying the treaty is “a strategic error” and urging them to rescind their ratifications.

In contrast, for many Pacific nations the lived experience of 50 years of nuclear testing still drives their stance today.

On the day Fiji ratified the treaty this year, the country’s high commissioner to the United Nations, Dr Satyendra Prasad, said:



Pacific Islanders continue to be exposed to nuclear radiation. Nuclear explosions, we know very well, do not observe national borders, they don't respect visa regimes, nor does nuclear waste respect time – it remains for generations.

For many survivors the intergenerational impacts of the testing remain central to justice.

Aunty Sue Coleman-Haseldine, a Kokatha-Mula woman from South Australia, was a child when she was subjected to nuclear fallout from the British nuclear testing in the 1950s.

She declared in an address to a UN conference in 2014: "We want nuclear weapons permanently banned and the uranium that can create them left in the ground. If you love your own children and care for the children of the world, you will find the courage to stand up and say 'enough'."

The unresolved injustice in the region drives many to support the new treaty, which bans the use, threat of use and the testing of nuclear weapons.

Amongst its objectives, there are what are termed "positive obligations". These include assistance to victims of nuclear weapons use and testing, as well as environmental remediation for areas affected — a marked shift to include humanitarian law alongside more traditional nuclear disarmament law.

The treaty calls for "age and gender-sensitive assistance ... including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support". But importantly it does not abrogate responsibility for those who used nuclear weapons.

A former Marshall Islands foreign minister, the late Tony de Brum, spoke often of the long-term impact of US nuclear testing on his people. He frequently recalled his own childhood experience of the tests.

Every time one of those things went off, it was yet another trauma – I would challenge anyone to live through 12 years of testing in the Marshalls, that does not come away with a permanent scar somewhere in your system. That is a mark of that period.

The legacy of environmental, human and cultural harms is compounded by immense grief and frustration due to opaque record keeping and deliberate subterfuge on behalf of the states responsible for the testing.

Historical truth-telling will be key to nuclear justice for many across the Pacific.

Calling for an opening up of nuclear testing records held by the US, de Brum said: "You cannot continue to withhold the necessary information that we need in order to make decisions on issues that are fair and proper for our people."

We need a new commitment to transparency and accountability from all nations involved in historic nuclear testing. After generations of nuclear experimentation, the impacts of these weapons tests and resulting nuclear waste across lands and ocean remain to be studied across the Pacific.

The removal of historical silences is necessary for such studies to even begin.



This new treaty enters international law with many promises for nuclear justice.

It is well past time.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/25/now-that-nuclear-weapons-are-the-pacific-demands-truth-on-decades-of-testing>

Australia

Australia should establish a new "Pacific Access" visa category that could be used by Pacific islanders forced from their homes by climate change and natural disasters, a new policy paper has argued, warning of growing displacement in Australia's region in coming decades.

Disasters displaced three times as many people as conflict around the world last year, the paper from University of New South Wales' Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law says, and the Asia-Pacific region is the hardest hit. Between 2008 and 2018, the Asia-Pacific saw more than 80% of all new global displacement.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/21/australia-should-create-pacific-visa-to-reduce-impact-of-climate-change-and-disaster-on-islanders>

The policy paper is available at:

https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2020/10/21/Policy_brief_10_Climate_Change.pdf

New Zealand

New Zealand's horticulture sector is hopeful the government will allow it to bring in Pacific seasonal workers for the upcoming picking season. Along with viticulture, the sector's usual system of employing Pacific Islanders under the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme has been disrupted by the pandemic.

Pipfruit New Zealand's Trade Policy and Strategy spokesman Gary Jones says his sector is three or four thousand workers short.

He said growers believed they should be able to bring in workers from covid-free countries.

Jones said plans were in place to ensure workers who come for the seasonal work could get back home again.

"We will be presenting them (the plans) to government, and I think they will be received reasonably positively. But I would hope that all the players here, including the Pacific Island governments, all come together to get a good solution, so that we can support the Pacific Island economies and the New Zealand economy, in a combined, mutually beneficial way." he said.

"There are some challenges of course, and we understand those. If we bring workers in we have to be able to get them out again.



"We've been working very hard to get last season's workers out. And there's flights that have been going just in the last week or so, that we've put charters on."

"The capacity in the Pacific, in those covid-free countries, to quarantine is probably the whole pinch-point in any plan to bring workers back in and get them."

Jones said the sector believed it should be able to bring the workers in, isolate them and test them in a system appropriate to the low level of risk they represent coming from covid-free countries.

"That would allow us to support the Pacific islands and the investment of getting workers home, and equally having strong isolation mechanisms in place and to cover the costs of those when we return the workers."

"That's something I think the government is up for, or the new government that's being formed I expect will be up for."

According to Andrew Craig, the Immigration Policy Manager at Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE), the government was aware of submissions from the horticulture and viticulture sector employers for a border exception for RSE workers to support the upcoming harvest.

"Steps have been taken to provide flexibility for onshore RSE and other migrant workers to work in the sector," he explained.

"Critical worker class exceptions are agreed by a group of Government Ministers with advice from cross agency-officials led by MBIE.

"These decisions balance a large number of factors, including humanitarian reasons, reuniting families, economic needs, and ensuring sufficient skills, experience and talents are available."

Hundreds of Russian and Ukrainian seamen have been flown into New Zealand this month to work in the country's deep-sea fishing industry, which is normally reliant on overseas workers and has been struggling amid the pandemic. However a number of these seamen have tested positive for covid-19 since arriving and are in isolation in their Christchurch hotel.

MBIE was asked why horticulture and viticulture sectors have not been able to fly in foreign workers like the fishing industry had been.

"Class exceptions are only considered where there is a critical workforce gap that cannot be filled domestically, there is no displacement of New Zealanders, and where industries can demonstrate a plan for education, training, wages and other activities that will attract New Zealanders into their sector."

Andrew Craig added that all exceptions must deliver a clear benefit for New Zealand and the impact on managed isolation and quarantine capacity must be manageable.

Meanwhile, Jones said the workers needed from the Pacific are those who are experienced, and able to be deployed quickly.



Time is of the essence, because a critical time for the apple industry approaches with thinning time in November and December, and then even more importantly the harvest season from February through to May.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/429165/nz-horticulture-sector-hopeful-of-bringing-pacific-workers-back>