



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

December 2019





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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.

02-06 December 2019

Organisations update

SPREP

Sea level rise washing over maritime boundaries in the Pacific: Sea level continues to rise at an increasing rate. According to the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change it is forecast the extreme sea level events that now happen every 100 years will happen on an annual basis by 2100.

According to the Pacific Marine Climate Change Report Card 2018, between 1993 and 2017, satellite measurements show that there has been a rise in sea level of 3 – 6 mm each year for the Pacific islands but with some notable differences between islands.

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which provides the regime for establishing maritime boundaries and maritime zones was adopted before the impacts of climate change were fully realised. Now with sea level rise there are wide ranging implications for maritime boundaries in the Pacific islands, which are all large ocean nations having rights over huge maritime zones and their resources.

Under the Law of the Sea Convention, there are criteria for natural features that generates the baselines defining the countries' maritime boundaries, and as these undergo changes such as sea level rise, their ability to generate maritime zones may be questioned.

Baselines are the references for the Exclusive Economic Zones or Territorial Seas, yet when these lines are no longer on the map where they were as the water has physically risen, it does pose a challenge.

Now that sea level rise and its impact upon maritime boundaries has been acknowledged as an issue of concern for the Pacific, work will be undertaken to address this across the region through the support of the Australian Government.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/sea-level-rise-washing-over-maritime-boundaries-in-the-pacific>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Cook Islands

The Cook Islands government has appointed a new Seabed Minerals Commissioner. Local lawyer Alexandrya Herman will take over the Seabed Minerals Authority for the next three years from January. The authority is charged with advancing licensed exploration activities within the Cook Islands maritime zone.



Planned seabed mining activities were openly criticised in September by the prominent marine biologist and former Marae Moana marine reserve director Jacqui Evans. Her subsequent removal from the government role drew criticism.
<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/405935/new-seabed-minerals-commissioner-for-cooks>

09-13 December 2019

Organisations update

UNFCCC

COP25 has taken place in Madrid.

UN chief António Guterres expressed his feelings on Twitter, but refused to see the conference as a defeat, and wrote that he is "more determined than ever to work for 2020 to be the year in which all countries commit to do what science tells us is necessary to reach carbon neutrality in 2050 and a no more than 1.5 degree temperature rise".

However, by Friday, when the conference had been expected to end, agreement on some important issues had been reached by negotiators, for example on capacity building, a gender programme, and technology, but an overall deal was held up over disagreement on the larger, and more contentious issues dealing with loss and damage caused by man-made climate change, as well as financing for adaptation.

Weary negotiators worked through Friday night, at the request of the Chilean president of the COP, but a draft version of the outcome text released on Saturday morning was reported to have underwhelmed all parties to the negotiations, with representatives of NGOs and civil society describing it as unacceptable, and a betrayal of the commitments made under the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

At 3pm local time on Saturday afternoon, a press conference was held by the COP organisers, explaining that the negotiators were still hard at work, aiming to "show the outside world that we can deliver, that multilateralism works."

By Saturday evening, there was still no sign of a deal, prompting acclaimed 16-year-old activist Greta Thunberg, one of the high-profile speakers at the Climate Action Summit held at UN Headquarters in September, to announce that "it seems like COP25 in Madrid is falling apart right now. The science is clear, but the science is being ignored".

Improved commitments announced at all levels

Despite the disappointment voiced at the contents of the outcome document, several announcements made during the two-week conference to indicate progress. The European Union, for example, committed to carbon neutrality by 2050, and 73 nations announced that they will submit an enhanced climate action plan (or Nationally Determined Contribution). A groundswell of ambition for a cleaner economy was also evident at a regional and local level, with 14 regions, 398 cities, 786 businesses and 16 investors are working towards achieving net-zero CO2 emissions by 2050.

Discussions held during COP25 broadened the understanding of the science behind the climate crisis, and the critical need for urgency: the UN Global Compact, which works with the private sector, announced that 177 companies have now agreed to set science-based climate targets that align with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and reaching net-



zero emissions by no later than 2050. That is double the number of companies that signed up to the pledge at the Climate Action Summit, representing private sector emissions equivalent to the annual total CO2 emissions of France.

Scottish bagpipes were heard in Madrid on Friday, marking next year's climate conference, to be held in Glasgow, Scotland. COP26, due to be held in December 2020, is being touted as an important milestone in the fight against climate change, because countries will be expected to present upgraded national climate plans, that go beyond commitments made under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053561>

UN Network on Migration

1st Annual Meeting of the UN Network on Migration- One year after Marrakech, the first annual meeting of the United Nations Network on Migration was an opportunity (a) to review the Network's progress; (b) to review working arrangements and explore ways to further enhance collaboration; (c) to identify emerging challenges and (d) to take decisions on the next steps.

Joint Statement by the United Nations Network on Migration-Annual Meeting/International Migrants Day is available at: <http://migrationnetwork.un.org/statement/joint-statement-united-nations-network-migration-annual-meetinginternational-migrants-day>

The UN Network on Migration by the Coordinator's speech is available at: <http://migrationnetwork.un.org/statement/update-un-network-migration-coordinator>

SPREP

Partnership Strengthened Between SPREP and Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre: Stronger collaboration for capacity building activities for both the Pacific and Caribbean communities will now be ensured with the signing of an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) extension between the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) today at the Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion in Madrid, Spain. The initial MOU was signed in June 2012 between the Parties in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The extension of the MOU signed today seeks greater strengthening of collaboration between both Parties.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/partnership-strengthened-between-sprep-and-caribbean-community-climate-change-centre>

ILO

Director-General Guy Ryder launches Climate Action for Jobs Initiative at COP 25. His opening remarks are available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_732232/lang--en/index.htm



Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Samoa

Seventy people have now died from Samoa's measles outbreak, UN humanitarian confirmed on Tuesday, as the organization released emergency funding to help the authorities step up efforts to eradicate the preventable disease. The development – announced by UN emergency relief chief Mark Lowcock - means that \$2.6 million will be made available for the small Pacific island, where health providers have been reportedly overwhelmed. In addition, the funding will help to deliver mental health and psychosocial support and provide clean water and sanitation, along with public health information.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053131>

Fiji

Fiji's displacement guidelines were launched at the Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion at COP25. The Guidelines for Displacement was finalised this year, with further protections in place in the event that climate and disaster related displacements occur despite adaptation and risk-reduction efforts.

Vunidogoloa in the Cakaudrove province on Vanua Levu was the first village to be relocated two kilometres inland to escape rising oceans. Since then, a further two communities have been relocated to higher ground with at least 45 other villages that will need to be relocated in the near future.

These Guidelines have been formulated taking into consideration existing national policies and international humanitarian best practices. Consultations were held in Fiji, attended by Government agencies, ministries, private sector, civil societies and academia were involved to help ensure there was a wide and inclusive basis for the development of the Guidelines.

The Government also launched the Fiji's Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples Trust Fund in September this year, as part of a concerted national effort to avert loss and damage and protect the most vulnerable Fijians from the impacts of climate change.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/fijis-displacement-guidelines-launched-at-the-moana-blue-pacific-pavilion>



16-20 December 2019

Organisations update

UNHCR

The Global Refugee Forum takes place on 16 (Advance Session), 17 and 18 December 2019 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

To access the programme: <https://www.unhcr.org/5df678447>

It was concluded in Geneva on Wednesday with more than 770 pledges of support, covering areas such as protection, employment, and education, for refugees and the communities which have taken them in.

Development banks, as well as states and other stakeholders, also made financial commitments totaling more than \$10 billion, according to an initial analysis from the UNHCR. The Forum revealed a “decisive shift” towards long-term action to assist the more than 25.9 million people worldwide who have fled their homelands due to conflict, persecution or violence.

“Public support for asylum has wavered in recent years. And in many cases communities that host refugees have felt overwhelmed or forgotten. But refugee situations are ‘crises’ only when we let them become so, by thinking short term, by failing to plan or work together across sectors, and by neglecting the communities they arrive in,” said Filippo Grandi, who also heads UNHCR.

The Forum is a key element of the Global Compact on Refugees, which the international community signed last December. It calls for Global Refugee Forums to be held every four years. More than 3,000 participants attended this first gathering, ranging from representatives of governments, international financial organizations, business, civil society, and humanitarian and development organizations, as well as refugees themselves.

The substantial commitments they made included school places for refugee children, new government policies, resettlement, clean energy, infrastructure and better support for host communities and countries.

The private sector accounted for the widest range of commitments, with strong support for providing job opportunities for refugees, according to UNHCR.

Business groups pledged \$250 million, while at least 15,000 jobs will be made available to refugees as will some 125,000 hours per year of free legal aid.

Additionally, several countries-of-origin made commitments relating to the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and other displaced communities.

Progress will be tracked

UNHCR said further pledges are also expected, and indicators have been established to track progress and assess success, for example in jobs created, school places and reduction of poverty levels.

A stock-taking meeting will take place in two years, and the second Global Refugee Forum is scheduled for late 2023.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053881>



SPREP

SPREP facilitated the participation of 12 Pacific islanders to the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Impact Assessment (NZAIA) held at the University of Auckland, 27 -28 November 2019. The theme of the conference addresses an important dimension of planning for climate change: "Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Assessing the Impacts". The two-day conference looked at the potential impacts of climate change adaptation and mitigation in New Zealand and the Pacific and emphasized the role that impact assessment can play to inform choice and design of adaptation and mitigation measures.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/pacific-islands-share-eia-experience-at-the-annual-conference-of-new-zealand-association-for-impact-assessment>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Torres Strait Regional Authority, Australia

The Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP, has joined the Torres Strait Regional Authority Board, in welcoming Ms Leilani Bin-Juda as the next Chief Executive Officer of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

Ms Bin-Juda is of Torres Strait Islander heritage and will be the first woman to be substantively appointed to lead the Authority. Her appointment will commence 31 January 2020.

<https://www.forumsec.org/appointment-of-the-torres-strait-regional-authority-chief-executive/>

The Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CAN-CC)

Atoll nations make a collective stand for their right to remain in their islands in the face of climate change. "I will not leave the lands of my ancestors! I will not abandon my motherland! I refuse to leave the only place I call home!"

These were the words of 21-year-old youth and future leader of Kiribati, Ms. Tabitha Awerika, at a side event organised by the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CAN-CC), on the sidelines of the Twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP25).

Ms. Awerika spoke out about the challenges and uncertainties faced by youth in low-lying atoll nations in the Pacific such as Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, as well as the Maldives, who are all members of the CAN-CC.

She asked world leaders to listen to the science, as well as the cries and pleas of those living in Pacific small island states who are at the front-lines of climate change and have continued with a business-as-usual approach.

"You may have heard this cry before, but I must continue to burden your ears and conscience until you do listen!"



Coral atoll nations are comprised entirely of coastlines, with the highest points on these islands being just two meters above sea-level. These nations are facing the severe impacts of climate change, such as king tides, droughts, more frequent droughts, increased frequency and strength of extreme weather events, as well as diseases that are brought about as a result of these impacts.

The atoll nations of Kiribati, Maldives, Republic of Marshall Islands and Tokelau and Tuvalu, joined forces to form the Coalition, to give them a collective voice on the very real threat to their survival as a people, and their ability to continue living on the lands of their ancestors, as the climate emergency looks to worsen over time.

H.E. Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati, revealed that his country continues to experience extreme weather events and rising sea levels as a result of a rapidly and dangerously changing climate. The effects have impacted drinking water wells, which are now inundated with saltwater, leaving his people no choice but to drink salty water, which, in turn, results in health problems.

Other infrastructure within the country have also been affected, such as schools, transportation and communications.

“Infrastructure development and maintenance is a big issue in the face of climate change, and the Government has put in funds from its meagre savings towards these areas, but it is nowhere near enough,” H.E. President Taneti said.

The Minister of Health of the Government of Tuvalu, Hon. Isaia Taape, said there has been an increase in climate change-related health cases in his country.

“Tuvalu is already seeing devastating impacts of climate change on its communities. Extreme weather events, sea-level rise and saltwater inundation have resulted in diseases such as diarrhoea from contaminated food and water, respiratory diseases and non-communicable diseases as a result of compromised food security,” Hon. Taape said.

The country has also recorded outbreaks of dengue fever from the months of January to June, with linkages to the increased and prolonged rainfall during that period.

In the Indian Ocean, the Maldives are also feeling the impacts of climate change hitting them where it hurts the most – their tourism industry, which has been the country’s major income earner for decades.

“People come to the Maldives to see our underwater gardens, creatures and unique biodiversity, but because countries continually pump large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, warming the planet, and causing sea levels to rise due to the polar ice caps melting, our corals are dying and are not given enough time to regenerate,” said Hon. Dr. Hussein Hassan, Minister of Environment of Maldives.

“These things are happening not because of anything we have done. They are happening because big emitters continue to pump these harmful gases into our atmosphere, and to rectify these problems, we have to borrow money from banks with interest, and beg these big emitters to give us money so we can adapt to these changes,” he added.

The Pacific leaders and youth who spoke out today all had the same message to the world.

They do not want to be climate refugees, they do not want to leave the lands of their identity, and they will fight for their natural right to continue living in the lands of their ancestors.



The Accelerating Action for Resilient Atolls and Productive Oceans side event was organised by the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change. Other speakers included Mr. Pa Ousman Jarju, Director of the Division of Country Programming of the Green Climate Fund, Mr. Bill Hare, Chief Executive Officer and Senior Scientist from Climate Analytics, Mr. Woochong Um, Director General, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department of the Asian Development Bank, and Mr. Carlon Zackhras, youth representative from the Republic of Marshall Islands.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/atoll-nations-make-a-collective-stand-for-their-right-to-remain-in-their-islands-in-the-face-of-climate-change>

23-31 December 2019

Organisations update

PIFS

Pacific Islands Forum Chair Statement on the Outcome of COP 25 in Madrid:

Funafuti, Tuvalu: The outcome of the recent climate negotiations at COP 25 in Madrid, Spain was utterly disappointing, the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Hon Kausea Natano, said today.

“The lack of ambition and urgency on climate action emanating from COP 25 is very concerning, particularly for those of us Small Islands Nations on the front lines of the climate crisis that is confronting us now.”

In reflecting on the Pacific Island Forum’s collective commitment to Urgent Climate Action Now through the Kainaki II Declaration, the Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor reaffirmed the Forum Chair’s earlier sentiments that “the shared prosperity of our Blue Pacific continent can only safely exist if the international community pursues efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C, as set out in the Paris Agreement.”

“It is disheartening that our collective political commitment and resolve, as the Pacific Islands Forum, was not upheld by the parties to this declaration, where it mattered most – that is in the negotiating rooms in Madrid,” said the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

He further added, “2020 will be crunch-time for us all, as no nation can afford to repeat the depressing outcome of COP 25 – because it will be at the peril of the Blue Planet as we have known it. As we now turn our preparations to COP 26, I call on my colleague Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum to reaffirm and uphold the commitment that we have made through the Kainaki Declaration and strive for ambitious climate action that positively responds to the indisputable scientific evidence that has been presented us through the Special IPCC Reports.”

-ENDS-

<https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-islands-forum-chair-statement-on-the-outcome-of-cop-25-in-madrid/>



WMO

Twelve international organizations providing assistance to developing countries come together at the UN Climate Change Conference today to launch the Alliance for Hydromet Development.

The members of the Alliance have committed collectively to ramp up action to help developing countries deliver high-quality weather forecasts, early warning systems and hydrological and climate services. Known in short as “hydromet” services, these underpin resilient development by protecting lives, property and livelihoods.

The founding members of the Alliance for Hydromet Development are the Adaptation Fund, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, Islamic Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank, World Food Programme and World Meteorological Organization

<https://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/media-advisory-launch-of-hydromet-alliance-12-international-organizations>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Kiribati

The World Bank has approved \$US15 million to go towards a major water project in Kiribati. The South Tarawa Water project aims to provide people on Kiribati's most populated island with better access to a safe, reliable and climate-resilient water supply.

The bulk of the funding for the \$US58m project is being provided by the Asian Development Bank and the Green Climate Fund, which announced \$US41.63m in support in September.

The Kiribati government will also be putting up \$US1.49m.

Kiribati's capital, Tarawa, is overcrowded and has fragile water resources due to its small size, lack of capacity for storage and small land area.

This combination of overcrowding and inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene is also closely linked to waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea and dysentery.

The project aims to address these issues by expanding and modernising South Tarawa's water supply network to deliver piped water to homes.

It will also support the construction of seawater desalination systems that will meet water demands and increase drought resilience up to the year 2040.

The project, which is expected to be completed in 2027, will be managed and implemented through Kiribati's Ministry of Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy.

Kiribati's infrastructure minister Ruateki Tekaiara said it would help to make people in South Tarawa healthier and more resilient to droughts and climate change while also adding to their economic and social development.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/405866/world-bank-approves-us15m-towards-kiribati-water-project>



PNG

The Bougainville Referendum Commission has released the final enrolment and voter turnout figures from the autonomous Papua New Guinea region's independence referendum.

In the non-binding referendum's result announced last week, an overwhelming 97.7 percent for Bougainville's independence.

The final voter turnout of 87.4 percent comes from the 181,067 persons who voted in the referendum, out of a total of 207,213 persons on the final referendum roll.

Chief Referendum Officer Mauricio Claudio said that it was a record voter turnout for a PNG electoral process.

To come into effect, the referendum result needs to be ratified by PNG's national parliament.

First there will be consultations between the PNG and Autonomous Bougainville governments beginning in the new year.

Number of votes for Greater Autonomy: 3,043

Number of votes for Independence: 176,928

The referendum process is currently within the 40-day appeals period, ending 20 January 2020.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/405859/bougainville-referendum-voter-turnout-record-high-for-png>