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A fair-weather friend?

Australia's relationship with a climate-
changed Pacific

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The opinions expressed and conclusions drawn remain the responsibility of the author.

Abbreviations

ALP	Australian Labor Party
CCDR	Climate Change & Development Roundtable
CPRS	Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
GHG	Greenhouse gas
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
ONA	Office of National Assessments
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
SPF	South Pacific Forum
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Summary

Climate change will bring significant challenges to the island nations of the Pacific. Sea-level rise, flooding and storm surges will result in erosion, salinisation and decreasing biodiversity. Fresh water supplies will be scarcer, there will be more disease outbreaks, less viable arable land for food production and the fishing and tourism industries will suffer. For atoll islands with high points only a few metres above sea level, the situation is dire. It is expected that the more vulnerable amongst Pacific Island communities will be forced to migrate as a result of these environmental changes in the coming decades. Indeed, the people of the Carteret Islands are already undergoing an essential relocation to Papua New Guinea and Bougainville.

The appropriate response to these devastating impacts must be threefold, with action urgently needed on *mitigation*, *adaptation* and, ultimately, *migration*. However, the developing nations of the Pacific cannot effectively pursue any of these actions alone. There is a pressing need for global mitigation of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to curb the most devastating of these impacts. Despite whatever mitigation targets may be enacted, however, it is too late to prevent some changes occurring to the climate. Therefore, significant adaptation is required to build resilience to climate impacts and reduce the threat to livelihood, including the planning of migration options for when land becomes uninhabitable. The developed world needs to assist Pacific communities to minimise vulnerability to the potentially devastating harm of climate change. In particular, Australia, as both the self-proclaimed regional leader and a major player in the worldwide production of GHGs, has a responsibility to assist its neighbours.

This paper examines Australia's attitudes to climate change in the region under the two most recent federal governments. The Howard Government's engagement with the region profoundly influenced understandings of Australia's role in a climate-changed Pacific. During its time in office, the realities of climate change were largely denied, the Pacific was portrayed as volatile and potentially threatening and non-Anglo migrants were demonised as the Australian electorate's fears of terror and outsiders were exploited. This agenda sidelined discussions of meaningful adaptation assistance and neutered Australian ambitions to

engage with the complex issues of possible climate-induced forced migration within the Pacific.

Initially in opposition and later in government, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) took issue with this approach. The ALP conspicuously accepted the probability of anthropogenic climate change. It also recast discussions of security in the Pacific as 'collective' within a developmental 'human security' framework. As well as taking the symbolic step of ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, the Rudd Government committed to a host of specific actions aimed at assisting the Pacific region to cope with the impacts of climate change. From his time in opposition to the opening months of his term in office, Prime Minister Rudd's rhetoric was aimed at rekindling Pacific faith in Australia's leadership. The Labor Government vowed to work hard towards significant climate-change mitigation, both at home and abroad. Generous adaptation assistance was guaranteed to Pacific nations. And perhaps most profoundly, in the increasingly likely event that these will be necessary, the ALP promised to champion compassionate solutions to the problem of displaced neighbours.

Comparing pre-election rhetoric and early promises with the actual progress achieved thus far tells a less optimistic story. Over halfway into its first term, the Rudd Government has failed to secure a more hopeful outlook for Pacific Islanders when it comes to climate change. The targets set in the proposed domestic emissions trading scheme and the lack of progress on global negotiations to reduce GHGs lead Pacific Island nations to doubt the prospects for mitigation.

In that case, it would seem that extensive adaptation assistance and, ultimately, reassurances on the issue of resettlement are the only responsible remedies an honest regional leader could hope to offer when confronting a climate-changed future. Unfortunately, this has not been the case so far. The adaptation assistance that has been committed is inadequate and is being spread too thinly with much of the funds directed to projects that have nothing to do with building resilience in Pacific communities. The Labor Party now refuses even to discuss the issue of climate-change-induced migration.

The Rudd Government cannot continue to drag the chain on mitigation and simultaneously refuse to openly and honestly

engage with the Pacific on providing real adaptation assistance and initiating discussions about migration planning. It is an entirely incoherent policy position, which cannot be sustained, particularly when Australia claims to have the region's interest at heart.

In August 2009, Australia will host the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) meeting in Cairns, Queensland. As Chair, Prime Minister Rudd has the opportunity to capitalise on the powerful sentiment of the Niue Declaration on Climate Change, which came out of last year's PIF meeting. Concrete action on these issues is imperative, not only for the wellbeing of Pacific communities, but also for the legitimacy of the Australian claim to regional leadership. If real progress is to fall by the wayside, however, replaced by another year of hollow rhetoric, the Rudd Government's approach to the Pacific will be confirmed as nothing more than business as usual.

1. Introduction

1.1 A threatened region: climate-change impacts in the Pacific

The Pacific Islands region is recognised as an area that will be particularly adversely affected by climate change.¹ The tens of thousands of islands and atolls that constitute the region are grouped into 12 independent states (The Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu); two self-governing territories (Cook Islands and Niue); and the eight remaining territories of France, Britain, New Zealand (NZ) and the United States (US). Due to the immense cultural and physical diversity within the region,² there will be significant variations in the ways different people on different islands experience the outcomes of climate change and any discussion of these impacts within the Pacific must be read as generalised.³ Nonetheless, such generalisations are useful in establishing a broad understanding of the acute vulnerability of communities in the region to the effects of a changing climate.

The range of effects that will result from climate change in the Pacific are predominantly negative.⁴ Coastal seawater inundation and storm surges are expected to increase. Freshwater resources,

¹ N Mimura, L Nurse, R F McLean, J Agard, L Briguglio, P Lefale, R Payet and G Sem., 'Small Islands'. In: *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

CSIRO, *Climate Change in the Asia/Pacific region: A Consultancy Report*, prepared for the Climate Change and Development Roundtable by B L Preston, R Suppiah, I Macadam and J Bathols (CSIRO, 2006).

² It is important to note at the outset of any discussion of the Pacific that the idea of an homogenous Pacific region is somewhat misleading and conceals a remarkable diversity of environmental, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and political characteristics. See for example,

G Fry, *Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of the South Pacific*, Working Paper No. 1996/5 (Canberra: Dept. of International Relations, Australian National University, 1996);

M Jolly, 'Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and Foreign Representations of a Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19:2, 2007;

E Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6:1, 1994.

³ J Barnett, 'Titanic States? Impacts and Responses to Climate Change in the Pacific Islands', *Journal of International Affairs*, 59:1, 2005, pp. 207–219.

⁴ Mimura et al., pp. 689–712.

already scarce on smaller islands, are likely to be further compromised. The productivity of both subsistence and commercial agriculture will deteriorate with changes in soil salinity and more frequent weather extremes. Coral reefs and fisheries will be heavily impacted and biodiversity is likely to decline. Tourism, a key component of many Pacific Island economies, is likely to suffer. Climate change will exacerbate already poor levels of human health, with increases in malaria, dengue fever and food-induced and waterborne diseases probable.⁵ In short, as the 2006 Stern Review notes of developing countries more generally, the poorest nations 'will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem'.⁶

Socioeconomic forces and poor regulation often drive coastal degradation, putting coastal settlements at greater risk as tidal and storm events increase.⁷ For example, destruction of mangrove forests that naturally protect against tidal surges has proliferated as pressures to develop coastal land have risen, demonstrating the tension between development and environmental vulnerability.⁸ Apart from rain-storage tanks, freshwater resources on low-lying atoll islands are restricted to narrow subterranean 'lenses' that are highly susceptible to contamination from human wastes, oil and insecticides as they become flooded by high sea events or depleted in times of low rainfall. Increased salinity has forced many

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- ⁵ For more thorough examinations of the science and nature of Pacific climate impacts see, SPREP, *The Science and Impacts of Climate Change in the Pacific Islands*, meeting report. 1998. Accessed at: <http://www.sprep.org/publication/pub_list.asp?int_pub_cat1=4> on 14/05/08; Mimura et al., p. 689; CSIRO, *Climate Change in the Asia/Pacific Region*.; J Barnett, 'Adapting to climate change in Pacific island countries: the problem of uncertainty', *World Development*, 29:6, 2001, pp. 973–993; J Barnet, 'Global Warming and the Security of Atoll Countries', *Revue Juridique Polynésienne*, special edition edited by S Levine, A Powles and Y Sage on *Contemporary Challenges in the Pacific*, 2007, p. 191–216; Barnet, 'Titanic states?', p. 206.
- ⁶ N Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: the Stern Review* (H.M. Treasury, UK: October, 2006), p. 554. At <http://www.sternreview.org.uk>
- ⁷ UNDP, 'Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World', *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p.74.
- ⁸ A Simms, J Magrath and H Reid, *Up in Smoke? Threats From, and Responses to, the Impact of Global Warming on Human Development* (London: New Economics Foundation, 2004), p. 26; Barnet, 'Global Warming and the Security of Atoll Countries', p. 195.

families to begin growing their root crops in buckets rather than in the ground.⁹

Sea-level rise, anticipated to be one metre or more by the end of the century,¹⁰ will be the source of the most serious problems, especially on the atoll nations of Tuvalu, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tokelau (NZ) and the atoll territories of larger Pacific states where high points are only a few metres above sea level.¹¹ On the larger Pacific islands, where urbanisation is concentrated in coastal zones, natural protections such as mangroves or reefs have already been compromised by a range of human activities.¹²

Any sea-level rise will exacerbate existing problems of salt-water inundation and erosion with potentially devastating consequences for the socioeconomic wellbeing of Pacific communities.¹³ Land will be rendered uninhabitable and unproductive for food crops when minor sea-level rise leads to the salinisation of ground water.¹⁴ The people of the Carteret Islands of PNG are already undergoing a difficult but imperative relocation to mainland PNG and

⁹ CCDR, *Climate Change: Impacts and Australia's Role in Assisting our Most Vulnerable Neighbors*, Background briefer, (December 2007). Accessed at: <<http://www.ccdr.org.au/publications.html>> on 10/05/08.

¹⁰ K Richardson et al., *Synthesis Report*, from IARU International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions, Copenhagen, 10–12 March 2009 (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2009), p.10.

This report provides the most authoritative, reliable and up-to-date estimate of sea-level rise although it is worth acknowledging that figures about the extent of sea-level rise are still hotly debated. Contention about rising seas revolves around methods of measuring the extent of the rise and, in many ways, reflects arguments over climate change more generally. Various commentators, in particular climate-change sceptics, dispute that current and anticipated environmentally forced migration from Pacific Islands is a direct result of sea-level rise related to global warming. David Corlett provides an excellent discussion of this dispute in Chapter 2, 'Tuvalunacy or the real thing?', of his book *Stormy Weather: The challenge of climate change and displacement* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008).

See also: IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, S. Solomon et al. (eds) (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 13.

¹¹ Simms et al., *Up in Smoke?*

¹² Barnet, 'Titanic states?', p. 207.

¹³ Mimura et al., p. 689.

¹⁴ S de Tarczynski, 'Climate Change Refugees Look to Australia, N.Z.', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 1 September 2008. Accessed at: <<http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=43743>> on 21/09/08..

Bougainville.¹⁵ In Vanuatu, Kiribati, and Tuvalu it is expected that people will soon be forced to abandon their land as previously arable zones and marginal freshwater reserves become unviable.¹⁶

1.2 The adaptation imperative in the Pacific: mangroves to migration

The Pacific region displays a particularly high level of vulnerability to the climate-change impacts detailed above. The United Nations (UN) defines this vulnerability as ‘a measure of capacity to manage ... hazards without suffering long-term, potentially irreversible loss of well-being’.¹⁷ Poverty, underdevelopment, ineffective policy implementation and lack of infrastructure all exacerbate climate-change vulnerability along with environmentally unsustainable patterns of development (for example, the over-clearing of mangroves for coastal development).¹⁸ In other words, the extent to which environmental effects threaten human wellbeing is a function of the resilience that exists within the affected society; the human catastrophe that followed the climate disaster of Hurricane Katrina in the US provides a useful example.

There was scientific consensus long before the event that a large storm would wreak havoc in New Orleans, yet that consensus underestimated the scale of the effect upon humans when such a storm occurred.¹⁹ ‘The *human* disaster in Louisiana was triggered by vulnerabilities and inequities that have increased ... as social safety nets have been dismantled and institutions have been weakened.’²⁰ In the same way, the epic scale of the suffering that followed the 2004 Asian Tsunami was not simply a result of the

¹⁵ D Peebles, ‘Rudd’s chance to rebuild ties with the Pacific’, *Canberra Times*, 6 March 2008. Accessed at: <<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/news/opinion/editorial/general/rudds-chance-to-rebuild-ties-with-the-pacific/134994.aspx>> on 12/05/08.

¹⁶ M Komai, ‘Climate change creating havoc in Pacific islands’, *International Herald Tribune Online*, 20 August 2008. Accessed at: <<http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2008/08/20/asia/AS-Pacific-Forum.php>> on 23/08/08.

¹⁷ UNDP, ‘Fighting climate change’, p. 78.

¹⁸ J Barnett, ‘Titanic states?’.
UNDP, ‘Fighting climate change’, p. 79.

¹⁹ K O’Brien, ‘Are we missing the point? Global environmental change as an issue of human security’, Opinion Editorial, *Global Environmental Change*, 16, 2006, p. 1.

²⁰ O’Brien, p. 2 (emphasis added).

destructive capability of the ocean but rather a function of existing levels of vulnerability, inequity and marginalisation, all exacerbated by the destruction caused by the tsunami.²¹

People's vulnerability to climate change depends on a combination of their dependence on their ecosystem (for example, a coastal fisherman will be more vulnerable than a merchant banker), the extent to which the ecosystem is climate-sensitive, and their society's ability to absorb shocks. Because of the effects that climate change will have on biodiversity, human health, freshwater availability and food production, it is vital that Pacific societies are able to adapt in ways that minimise economic, social and environmental damage. Without effective adaptation, hard-won developmental gains in the Pacific may well be lost in the face of a changing climate.

Adaptation to climate change refers to 'those actions or activities that people undertake individually or collectively to accommodate, cope with or benefit from the effects of climate change'.²² In the words of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),²³ such adaptation involves:

[T]aking the right measures to reduce the negative effects of climate change (or exploit the positive ones) by making the appropriate adjustments and changes. There are many options and opportunities to adapt. These range from technological options such as increased sea defences or flood-proof houses on stilts, to behaviour change at the individual level, such as reducing water use in times of drought and using insecticide sprayed mosquito nets. Other strategies include early warning systems for extreme events, better water management, improved risk management, various insurance options and biodiversity conservation ...

In the Pacific, initiatives such as emergency preparedness for severe weather events, water-tank installation, sea-wall construction, coastal revegetation and appropriate agricultural

²¹ R Sukma, 'Indonesia and the tsunami: responses and foreign policy implications', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 60:2, 2006, pp. 213–228.

²² SPREP, *Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change*, 15 June 2005, p. 105. Accessed at: <http://www.sprep.org/publication/pub_list.asp?int_pub_cat1=4> on 12/06/08.

²³ UNFCCC, *Report on the expert meeting on adaptation for small island developing States*, 26th Session, Bonn, 7–18 May 2007, p.10.

planning are all examples of adaptive responses.²⁴ Adaptation is considered effective if socioeconomic degradation caused by climate change is minimised.

It is important to note that adaptation to its impacts is not necessarily a process specific to climate change. Insofar as the island nations of the Pacific exhibit ongoing vulnerability to natural hazards such as low freshwater availability, tidal waves and storms, there is a chronic need for initiatives that increase resilience quite apart from those needed to prepare for the added burden of climate change. In their article, 'Lifting the taboo on adaptation', Pielke et al. discuss the shortcomings of the predominant view that adaptation is the cost of, or solution to, failed mitigation. They contend that discussions of adaptation policy must be expanded to cover more than just the 'margins' of failed climate-change mitigation, arguing that regardless of the stance on anthropogenic climate change, increasing a developing society's resilience to climate-related events is good policy.²⁵ Bolstering the capacity of Pacific nations to adapt to existing environmental stresses should be seen as a 'no-regrets' policy. For example, even if both the climate and sea-level rise were to remain stable, conservation and replanting of coastal vegetation would nevertheless have a positive effect on fisheries, reef protection, coastline stabilisation and timber supply.

Unfortunately, the island nations of the Pacific possess a limited capacity to adapt to climate-change impacts. As the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded, '[I]n most cases [the Pacific Islands] have low adaptive capacity, and adaptation costs are high relative to GDP'.²⁶ Generally, gross national income per capita is low across the Pacific and the high proportion of subsistence farming means that there is a heavy reliance on the natural environment for meeting the most basic needs for food, water and shelter.²⁷ Thus,

²⁴ CSIRO, *Climate Change in the Asia/Pacific Region*, pp. 53–55.

²⁵ R Pielke Jr, G. Prins, S. Rayner and D. Sarewitz, 'Lifting the taboo on adaptation', *Nature*, 445, 8 February 2007, pp. 597–598.

²⁶ Mimura et al., p. 689.

²⁷ Barnett, 'Titanic states?', p. 206.

although the socioeconomic, cultural, and human costs of not adapting to climate change will be high and likely disastrous, the price of avoiding these costs via adequate adaptation is quite simply beyond the means of Pacific states.

It is this gap between their vulnerability and their capacity to adapt that so profoundly threatens Pacific Island nations. For years now, Pacific leaders have been desperately calling for significant and sustained financial assistance in order to pursue adaptation projects that build resistance to climate-change impacts. But regardless of any adaptation measures that Pacific communities enact, some people in coastal regions and entire lower-lying nations such as Kiribati and Tuvalu will almost certainly be forced, as sea levels rise, to make the ultimate adaptation—to leave their homes.

1.3 Climate-induced migration

The potential for large-scale human displacement in much of the world is perhaps the most graphic illustration of the disruption climate change is likely to bring. As the International Organization for Migration (IOM) explains, current estimates for the number of people at risk of being displaced by climate change ‘range between 25 million and 1 billion people by 2050’.²⁸ People of the Pacific region in particular are expected to experience forced migration as life in coastal communities and the low-lying atoll nations and islands becomes increasingly marginal.²⁹

The spectre of probable human displacement in the Pacific reveals the profound challenge that climate change poses to vulnerable societies. If, as is being speculated in the case of Tuvalu, an entire country has to relocate, the fate of the nation and the state is at

²⁸ O Brown, *Migration and Climate Change*, research paper No. 31 (Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2008), p. 12.

²⁹ IPCC, p. 708;
Brown, p. 25;
Barnett, ‘Adapting to climate change in Pacific Island countries’;
R Garnaut, *Garnaut Climate Change Review: Draft Report*, 2008, p. 192. Accessed at:
<<http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/pages/draft-report->> on 10/09/08;
Barnett, ‘Global Warming and the Security of Atoll Countries’.

best uncertain.³⁰ Beyond this extreme scenario, in a region where land lies at the core not only of security but also of status and identity, increasing numbers of dispossessed people will place immense pressure on national governments that may not have recourse to meaningful solutions.³¹ Where such options do exist, the very need to relocate raises a sense of futility and despair in a region where the land has deep personal and cultural significance. In the words of a Kiribati local, 'We can't just move to another country. I would love to go to Fiji. But there I have no land. There I am no one'.³² In other words, migration is generally not a desirable outcome. Rather, it is the last resort when climate-change mitigation has been insufficient and all other adaptation options have been exhausted. However, without being dismissive of the wishes of Pacific people to stay on their land, it is important to openly explore contingences. As Corlett argues, Pacific peoples' desire to remain in their homes is legitimate and understandable, but the decision to leave is becoming decreasingly 'optional'.³³

While it might be an emotive and easy headline, the people who are and will be displaced by sea-level rises and other climate impacts are not, as they are often labelled, 'climate refugees'. They do not meet the definition of a refugee in that they do not have a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion or nationality and they are not fleeing from their government. Thus, they are not covered by the UN 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This matter of semantics needs to be stressed. As the IOM notes, '[L]abels are important ... [W]hich definition [refugee or migrant] becomes generally accepted will have very real implications for the obligations of the international community under international law'.³⁴ Instead of 'refugee', this

³⁰ C Paskal, *How Climate Change is Pushing the Boundaries of Security and Foreign Policy*, Chatham House briefing paper, (British Institute for International Affairs, June 2007), p. 5. Accessed at: <<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/research/eedp/papers/view/-/id/499/>> on 15/09/08.

³¹ M Edwards, 'Security Implications of a Worst Case Scenario of Climate Change in the Pacific', *Australian Geographer*, 30:3, 1999, p. 320.

³² As quoted in IFRC, 'Pacific Islands Foretell Future of Climate Change', *ICRC World Disasters Report*, Chapter 4, 2002. Accessed at: <<http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2002/chapter4.asp>> on 29/09/08.

³³ Corlett, pp. 37–55.

³⁴ Brown, p. 13.

paper adopts the IOM's preference for the label of 'forced climate migrant'. The IOM defines the term as:

[P]ersons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.³⁵

This terminology is also far more acceptable to the people of the Pacific for whom 'the term refugee evokes a sense of helplessness and a lack of dignity'.³⁶ It is important to note, however, that not designating these people as 'refugees' in no way justifies treatment of the issue as anything less than urgent.³⁷

At present, there is no international consensus on what could or should happen to people displaced by climate change. In fact, the current migration regimes of most developed countries, including Australia, would not allow forced climate migrants entry, residence or citizenship. Furthermore, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has advised that the UN is not equipped to deal with 'climate change refugees' and that instead 'the broader international human rights regime should serve as the basis for guiding the responsibility of states towards' these displaced people.³⁸ While the sentiment of the UN is encouraging, Australia and most other countries would not consider themselves as owing positive human rights obligations towards foreign citizens who do not have refugee status as is the case with climate-induced migrants. This, however, is somewhat of a moot point. As the Pacific nations continue to remind the developed world, '[w]e should not [have to] negotiate for our continued existence on this planet'.³⁹ The right to life, self-determination and nationality of

³⁵ Brown, p. 15.

³⁶ J McAdam and M Loughry, 'We aren't refugees', *Inside Story*, 29 June 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.inside.org.au/we-arent-refugees/> accessed on 01/07/09.

³⁷ Brown, p. 41.

³⁸ K Gorethy, 'UNHCR backs off on climate refugees', *Post-Courier*, 13 January 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20090108/news09.htm>.

³⁹ S Pareti, *We are no lesser people, Pacific tells world talks*, media release, SPREP, 13 December 2008. Accessed at: http://www.sprep.org/article/news_detail.asp?id=587.

these people is being threatened and it is beyond the ability of their own governments to assist.⁴⁰

1.4 Australia's tradition of assistance to the Pacific

Australia has long assumed leadership and indeed custodianship of the Pacific, a result of the enduring understanding that Australian security hinges on a stable Pacific region.⁴¹ This relationship has been institutionalised in the ongoing extension of development assistance aid and the promotion of free-trade-based systems of regional economic integration. Consecutive Australian governments from both sides of politics have consistently made commitments to support, foster and, if necessary, create a 'developed' and prosperous Pacific. The current Labor Government has enthusiastically accepted this role, proclaiming a 'shared interest in the prosperity, growth, and stability of the Pacific', 'the capacity to assist', and indeed 'a responsibility to do so'.⁴² In the words of Prime Minister Rudd, 'The Pacific and the Islands of the South Pacific are core business for Australia's national interest'.⁴³

This tradition of assistance to the region has driven the diversion of just under \$1 billion of Australian aid money to Pacific nations in 2008–09.⁴⁴ It is also in this spirit of regional management that, since 2003, Australia has undertaken comprehensive police, military, legal and governance interventions into PNG and the

⁴⁰ E Pavahi, 'Pacific MPs say climate change biggest threat to human rights'. *Pacific Beat*, ABC Radio Australia, 29 December 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/programguide/stories/200812/s2452876.htm> accessed on 02/01/09.

⁴¹ G Fry, 'Australia's Regional Security Doctrine: Old Assumptions, New Challenges', in G Fry, ed., *Australia's Regional Security* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991); G Dobell, *The Arc of Instability: The History of an Idea*, The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre's 40th anniversary seminar series publication (Epress, Australian National University, 2006). Accessed at: <http://epress.anu.edu.au/sdsc/hap/mobile_devices/ch06.html> on 23/05/08.

⁴² R McMullan, 'Australia's policies in the Melanesia and wider Pacific Islands Region, including the Pacific Partnerships for development', speech at the launch of the Lowy Institute's Myer Foundation Melanesia Program, 27 March 2008. Accessed at <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=776>.

⁴³ K Rudd, Doorstop interview in Niue, 21 August 2008, at <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview_0437.cfm> accessed on 03/01/09.

⁴⁴ AusAID, *Australia's International Development Assistance Program 2008–09*, media release, 13 May 2008. Accessed at: http://www.usaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID=5748_7603_7093_1168_6081.

Solomon Islands. These initiatives, the Strongim Gavman Program in PNG and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), remain ongoing. The responsibility to 'protect' Pacific nations from their own political, economic or social inadequacies and failures is commonly invoked within this tradition.⁴⁵ Surely then, Pacific climate change provides the ideal opportunity for Australia to exercise the creative middle-power leadership that the Rudd Government claims to wield. Australian regional leadership would be demonstrated best by a more aggressive pursuit of climate-change mitigation in the international arena on behalf of this vulnerable region and, closer to home, by making credible assurances that Australia will do what it takes to help Pacific societies weather the approaching storms.

1.5 Conclusion

Pacific Islanders live in societies that exhibit high vulnerability to the sorts of adverse impacts that climate change will deliver. As these changes progress and without extensive adaptation assistance, the kinds of impacts discussed above will significantly hinder, and in some cases reverse, progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)⁴⁶ that the current Australian Government has so emphatically adopted as benchmarks for Pacific development.⁴⁷ And as Pacific communities struggle with climate-change adaptation, the lack of any genuine resettlement options for forced migrants only creates an added sense of desperation.

To understand why Australia, despite professing a regional leadership role, has not been forthcoming with assistance for its neighbours in dealing with climate-change impacts, it is important

⁴⁵ Fry, *Framing the islands*.

⁴⁶ The MDG is a set of eight developmental targets, developed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and agreed upon by the world's nations to reduce poverty by 2015. They include 'halving extreme poverty, getting all children into school, closing the gap on gender inequality, saving lives lost to disease and the lack of available health care, and protecting the environment. These are achievable commitments to improve the well-being of the world's poorest people'. See AusAID, 'The Millennium Development Goals: the fight against global poverty and inequality', 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.aisaid.gov.au/keyaid/mdg.cfm> on 23/09/08.

⁴⁷ P Garrett and R McMullan, *Federal Labor's plan for international development assistance and climate change* (Australian Labor Party, 24 July 2007). Accessed at <www.alp.org.au/media/0707/msCCida240.php> accessed on 25/11/07.

to consider the era in which the issues came to prominence. Under John Howard's leadership, meaningful assistance to the Pacific was obstructed. It is in no small part due to the influence of the Howard Government over the politics of climate change in the region that an effective framework for action is still so far away. After all, how can a government help its neighbours when it denies the existence of any threat to them whilst convincing its own electorate to fear them?

2. The Howard years: failed states or a failed neighbour?

2.1 Introduction: a threatened Australia

When Pacific Island communities first began to confront the very serious realities of a future threatened by climate change, Australia, the self-proclaimed regional leader, refused to position itself to provide valuable assistance. Instead, the Howard Government of 1996–2007 created a ‘Fortress Australia’ mentality⁴⁸ in which the probable effects of climate change in the Pacific were ‘securitised’, albeit obliquely. The Howard Government promoted a self-centred version of international politics and security, seeing other nations as motivated purely by economic and military power and acting only in their own national interests.

This attitude emphasised Australia’s security as paramount and completely disregarded climate-change vulnerability in the Pacific. Australia was portrayed as threatened by overburdened, weak states and the unregulated movements of desperate and dangerous human beings, a construction that generated a powerful politics of fear around Australia’s place in the region. In essence, the country was in peril and an unstable Pacific was a possible threat. By painting this view, the government was able to dismiss the urgent need for early action on climate-change mitigation and ignore Australia’s capacity to assist with regional adaptation.

2.2 The Pacific: Australia’s ‘arc of instability’

Despite traditionally seeing itself as a leader in the Pacific, Australia has a long history of discomfort with its geographical location. As Peter Varghese, Director General of the Office of National Assessments (ONA) has observed:

⁴⁸ K Marks, ‘Fortress Australia: Veneer of tolerance cracks’, *The Independent*, 2 September 2001. Accessed at: <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20010902/ai_n14419206/pg_1?tag=artBody;col1> on 14/09/08.

... [T]he historical memory of Australians is one of strategic anxiety, an angst which has been shaped by many elements: a small population on a large continent, a historical sense of isolation from cultural roots, [and] a pattern of instability in near regions.⁴⁹

This uneasiness in the national psyche has generated the concept of an 'arc of instability', which refers to the strategic uncertainty that Australia faces to its north and north-east. The 'arc of instability' discourse has played a significant role in Australia's relationship with the region. As Varghese explains, '[I]n strategic analysis, national psychology can be as important a vector as national capability'.⁵⁰

Under Howard, this tradition of discomfort was seamlessly merged with the 'war on terror' to fuel Australian fears of a breakdown of economic and political stability in the South Pacific.⁵¹ Responding to a period of perceived political disorder and decay of governance in the area, the Howard Government advocated and enacted an Australia-centric security agenda, which took a hardline stance against certain social, political and economic instabilities in the area, including any irregular migration.⁵²

Narratives representing Australia as threatened by its region have a rich history in the Australian geostrategic imagination. The continuing emphasis on self-defence is tied up with fears of a culturally and racially dissimilar region.⁵³ However, the historical construction exists to appeal to Australian insecurities and accordingly to achieve political ends rather than because of any

⁴⁹ P Varghese, 'Australia's Strategic Outlook: A Longer-Term View', speech by Director General of the Office of National Assessments to the Security in Government Conference, Canberra, 5 December 2007, p. 1. Accessed at: < <http://www.ona.gov.au/news.htm> > on 12/07/08.

⁵⁰ Varghese

⁵¹ G Fry, 'Our Patch: The War on Terror and Australia's New Interventionism in the South Pacific', in G Fry and T T Kabutaulaka, (eds.), *Intervention and State Building in the Pacific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

Burke, 'Caught between National and Human Security: Knowledge and Power in Post-crisis Asia', *Pacifica Review*, 13: 3, 2001, pp. 215–139.
Dobell, *The arc of instability*.

⁵² A Burke, *In Fear of Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Burke, *In Fear of Security*, p. 127.

clear and present threat emanating from Asia or the Pacific.⁵⁴ In 2007, the Director General of the ONA admitted that, 'Australia does not face any direct threat to its territorial integrity ... [W]e are quite well equipped to manage the consequences of strategic change'.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, the threat of terrorism and transnational lawlessness in the Pacific was constantly reinforced by the Howard Government after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. A simple link was made between unstable states and the likelihood that they would become waypoints for terrorism.⁵⁶ Justifying intervention in the Solomon Islands, Howard was blunt in claiming, '[I]t is not in Australia's interests to have a number of failed states in the Pacific' because 'failed states can all too easily become safe havens for transnational criminals and even terrorists'.⁵⁷ As the Pacific Islands became an 'important security front',⁵⁸ the government went so far as to declare the right to strike preemptively against threatening developments in 'failing' neighbouring states.⁵⁹

This has, perhaps, never been the most positive way to engage with the problems of the Pacific. The label of 'failed state' mistakenly implies a history of robust states in the Pacific that have somehow broken down. Critics of this description dispute that the 'state', as such, ever enjoyed much legitimacy in the Pacific in the first place. Instead, it is argued that much of the socioeconomic instability to which the term refers is the precise result of attempts to impress the democratic nation-state model on Pacific societies.

⁵⁴ M Cordell, 'Everybody Needs Good Neighbours', *Newmatilda.com*, 19 August 2008. Accessed at: <<http://newmatilda.com/2008/08/19/everybody-needs-good-neighbours>> on 23/08/08; Fry, 'Our patch'.

⁵⁵ Varghese.

⁵⁶ Fry, 'Our patch', p. 81.

⁵⁷ J Howard, Ministerial Statement to Parliament on the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), 12 August 2003, quoted in T Allard, and C Skehan, 'Danger Island', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 2003. Accessed at: <<http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=/articles/2003/06/27/1056683906987.html>> on 20/09/08. Fry, 'Our patch', p. 75.

⁵⁸ DFAT, *Transnational Terrorism: The threat to Australia*, 2004, p. xv. Accessed at: <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/terrorism>> on 23/09/08.

⁵⁹ A Patience, *The ECP and Australia's Middle Power Ambitions*, discussion paper 2005/4 (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2005).

Further, labels such as ‘weak’, ‘failing’, and ‘unstable’ reinforce the notion of the region as a threat to Australia whilst preventing discussion of the extent to which Australian policies might be complicit in the causes of these instabilities.⁶⁰

Indeed, Pacific leaders might well consider Australia to be a ‘failed neighbour’. Imposing paternalism on the Pacific and casting blame upon island nations may suit short-term Australian security objectives but it ignores the root causes of the instability. Worse still, the economic and structural demands of Australia’s neoliberal ‘solutions’ have led to resentment and friction and also disabled options for development more appropriate to Pacific communities.⁶¹ Yet the Howard Government managed to prime Australia’s perceptions of its neighbours in such a way that, as the impacts of climate change become more apparent, it is ‘our’ security against the threatening hoards ‘out there’ that remains embedded in the Australian psyche.

2.3 Refugees, racism and the politics of fear

The Howard Government’s treatment of refugees was extremely successful in constructing outsiders as threats in the minds of the Australian people. The *Tampa* affair and the terrorist attacks in the US occurred in quick succession in 2001 and led to an increased focus on national identity and an escalating securitisation of daily lives. By using force to deter the 433 refugees that had been picked up the Dutch shipping vessel, the *Tampa*, the government militarised Australia’s response to desperate people attempting to get to Australian shores.⁶² Ironically these refugees were sent to

⁶⁰ H Nelson, *Governments, States and Labels*, discussion paper 2006/1 (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2006), p. 1.

⁶¹ B Greener-Barcham and M Barcham, ‘Terrorism in the South Pacific? Thinking Critically About Approaches to Security in the Region’, *Alternative Journal of International Affairs*, 60:1, 2006, pp. 67–82;

C Slatter, ‘Neoliberalism and the Disciplining of Pacific Island States—The Dual Challenges of a Global Economic Creed and a Changed Geopolitical Order’, in M Powles, (ed.), *Pacific Futures* (Canberra: Pandanus, 2006);

C Slatter and Y Underhill-Sem, ‘Reclaiming Pacific Island Regionalism: Does Neoliberalism Have to Reign?’ in B D’Costa and K Lee Koo, *Gender and Global Politics in the Asia Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) (forthcoming).

⁶² P Smith, ‘Climate Change, Mass Migration and the Military Response’, *Orbis*, 51:4, 2007, p. 628.

the tiny Pacific island of Nauru for processing under the so-called 'Pacific Solution'. The emotive debate that ensued transposed the arrival of desperate foreigners on Australian shores into fears of terrorism to form one single shapeless existential threat.⁶³

Howard's use of 'dog-whistle politics'⁶⁴ for domestic political gain exposed a latent xenophobia in Australian society.⁶⁵ For example, in his 2001 election speech, the line that received the greatest applause was the now infamous slogan: '*We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come*'.⁶⁶ As Noble and Poynting point out, this can be read as a 'rational statement about national sovereignty' but it can just as easily be seen as a simple promise of protection of all that we hold sacred.⁶⁷ Australia, like much of the developed world, increasingly came to perceive unauthorised international migration, like terrorism, as a threat to national identity and militarised its response accordingly.

In 2006, the Lowy Institute released a compelling paper entitled *Heating up the planet: climate change and security*.⁶⁸ The central contention was that the rate rather than the magnitude of climate change is what makes the security implications so significant. Climate change, according to the paper, will threaten Australia's security. Weather extremes could exacerbate the region's food, water and energy insecurities and regional governments will find themselves hard-pressed to cope with the associated tensions. Sea-level rise will displace large numbers of people in Asia and '[i]t

⁶³ Burke, *In Fear of Security*, p. 221.

⁶⁴ A thorough discussion of Howard's use of 'dog-whistle' politics—the art of using coded language that refers to one item but also sends a message to other parts of the intended audience—can be found in J Fear, *Under the radar: Dog-whistle politics in Australia*, discussion paper 96 (Canberra: The Australia Institute, September 2007).

⁶⁵ C Lawrence, *Fear and Politics* (Victoria: Scribe, 2006).

⁶⁶ J Howard, 'Transcript of Address at the Federal Liberal Party Campaign Launch', Sydney, 2001. Accessed at <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/2001/speech1311.htm>.

⁶⁷ S Poynting and G Noble, 'Dog-Whistle Journalism and Muslim Australians since 2001', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, 109, 2003, p. 42.

⁶⁸ A Dupont and G Pearman, *Heating up the Planet: Climate Change and Security*, Lowy Institute paper 12 (Double Bay: Longvue, 2006).

will be extremely difficult to carry out forced evacuations or relocations without conflict and political disturbances'.⁶⁹

At a time when 'security' was never far from the screens and papers of the nation, the idea that climate change too could present a security threat easily gained traction. The Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) stated that across the region 'in their millions, people could begin to look for new land and they'll cross oceans and borders to do it'.⁷⁰ Even more decisively, Commissioner Keelty asserted that 'climate change is going to be the security issue of the 21st century'.⁷¹ Consequently, by 2007 Australian newspapers were worrying that global warming would 'create hordes of environmental refugees' in the region.⁷² This struck a chord with the Australian public, their government having demonised refugees and migrants for the previous decade.

Long before planning for forced climate migration became necessary, the Howard Government made clear who would be portrayed as a 'threat' and who would be 'threatened', further reducing any pressure to take action on climate change in the Pacific. These perceptions have been firmly lodged in the minds of many Australians and will be difficult to change. A 2008 survey conducted by The Australia Institute found that some two thirds of Australians are against, or unsure about, the idea of permanently resettling people displaced by climate change.⁷³ Yet thousands of Europeans and Americans remain in the country illegally and are *never* spoken of as constituting a threat to security. The issue, it seems, is not the danger posed by outsiders but rather a fear of difference.⁷⁴ As Anthony Burke argues, '[T]he perceived threat of

⁶⁹ Dupont and Pearman, p. 81.

⁷⁰ M Keelty, '2007 Inaugural Ray Whitrod Oration', 24 September 2007. Accessed at: <http://www.afp.gov.au/media/national_media/national_speeches/2007/inaugural_ray_whitrod_oration> on 12/05/08.

⁷¹ Keelty.

⁷² N Butterly, 'Security threats on the rise', *The West Australian*, 6 December 2007.

⁷³ Survey conducted by The Australia Institute between 2nd October and 8th October 2008. One thousand respondents representative of the adult Australian population by age, gender and state/territory were sourced from an independent online panel.

⁷⁴ Burke, *In Fear of Security*, p. 213.

the boat people really lay in their ... status as an unassimilable excess that the pure being of the Australian subject could not abide'.⁷⁵

2.4 Climate change as a threat to national security

Prime Minister Howard displayed mastery of a certain type of politics aimed at shaping and deploying the national psyche to suit his ideology. Without explicitly adopting a position on climate change, his government was driving public and political opinion towards a self-interested and adversarial approach to regional issues. At the time, opinion pieces on the security challenge of climate change worried frantically that 'potentially millions of poor and unskilled regional neighbours' will come 'begging for a new life' and in a destabilised Pacific 'terrorists will hijack climate change to recruit jihadists'.⁷⁶

Whilst noting that Howard was never explicit in characterising climate change as a national security threat of any significance, there is evidence to suggest that this is exactly what his government considered it to be. In 2007, the ONA was tasked with five major reports on the strategic implications of climate change.⁷⁷ The substance of these reports remains classified, suggesting that the Howard Government was all too aware of the potential significance of the situation. The decision to assign Australia's intelligence and strategy assessments agency to the analysis and reporting of this issue belies Howard's minimalist and defensive approach to the effects of climate change. It is ironic that one of the few governments that did not publicly accept the occurrence of climate change, nonetheless commissioned the nation's security apparatus with assessing its impacts.

If climate change is anywhere near as destructive as the general scientific consensus suggests it could be, territorial integrity—the foundation of national sovereignty—may be profoundly

⁷⁵ Burke, *In Fear of Security*.

⁷⁶ J Soderblom, 'Climate Change: Is it the Greatest Security Threat of the 21st Century?', *Security Solutions*, 52, March/April 2008, p. 68.

⁷⁷ Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration, Budget Estimates, 22 May 2007, p. 160, (P Varghese, Director-General, ONA).

challenged.⁷⁸ Migratory flows of people, resource scarcity and increased environmental strains are not sociological speculation but should rather be considered as probable physical impacts. The IPCC estimates that by 2080, 1.1 to 3.2 billion people will experience water scarcity, 200 to 600 million people will experience hunger and two to seven million a year will face coastal flooding.⁷⁹ As has been noted by the Australian Department of Defence, it is in fact climate change that might act as a catalyst for 'failed states' in the Pacific.⁸⁰

Surely, the people most directly affected will be the ones who feel the most insecure. It is understandable then that the Coalition Government's defensive security mindset regarding climate-change effects together with Howard's climate-change denialism antagonised Pacific nations who were all too aware of the threats posed to their security by the change in climate.⁸¹ At a 2007 UN conference debating whether climate change should be a Security Council concern, Pacific Island leaders supported the notion enthusiastically. In their opinion, 'the impact of climate change on small islands [is] no less threatening than the dangers guns and bombs pose to large nations'.⁸²

2.5 Conclusion

There is a deep irony at the heart of any narrative that portrays Australia as threatened and a failing Pacific region as the threat. Australia refused to recognise climate change officially for over a decade, during which Pacific leaders were already raising the

⁷⁸ J Macken, 'What happens after 2030?', *New Matilda.com*, 28 March 2008. Accessed at: <newmatilda.com/contributor/1244> on 28/04/08.

⁷⁹ As quoted in J Vidal, 'Climate change to force mass migration', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2007. Accessed at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/may/14/climatechange.climatechangeenvironment>> on 10/08/08.

⁸⁰ J Pearlman and B Cubby, 'Defence warns of climate conflict', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 2009; Dupont and Pearman.

⁸¹ Barnett, 'Global Warming and the Security of Atoll Countries'.

⁸² UNSC, *Security Council Holds First Ever Debate on Impact of Climate Change on Peace, Security, Hearing Over 50 Speakers*, media release, 17 April 2007. Accessed at: <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>> on 13/05/08.

alarm. At the 1992 South Pacific Forum (SPF), Pacific Island leaders clearly stated that ‘global warming and sea-level rise are the most serious threats to the Pacific region and the survival of some island states’.⁸³ Five years later, at the 1997 meeting of the SPF, now the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Howard forced the Forum to remove its concern for climate-change risks and its support for emissions reductions measures from the communiqué.⁸⁴

From the Pacific perspective, Australia was driving, not solving, insecurity in the region. Moreover, Howard’s bullying created resentment with Nauru’s President, Kinza Clodumar, suggesting that Australia’s disregard for Pacific Island realities undermined its right to membership of the Forum.⁸⁵ Ultimately, Howard’s security posturing and the pejorative assessment of the internal affairs and governance of Pacific states created the sense of a combustible region threatening Australian security and national interests. This view made it impossible to begin planning and developing programs for the extensive adaptation assistance now recognised as urgent and still hopelessly lacking in the Pacific. It also relegated the fate of Australia’s potentially displaced neighbours to a crude electoral slogan affirming the right to decide *who comes to Australia and under which circumstances they come*.

Yet by the time the 2007 Australian federal election was due, the reality of the changing climate had finally gained political currency both domestically and internationally. The plight of developing countries facing a climate-changed future was also acknowledged more widely. As the 2006 Stern Review made clear, developing countries cannot themselves finance adaptation to climate change. Further, ‘[t]he international community has an obligation to support them ... [W]ithout such support there is a serious risk that

⁸³ SPF, ‘Forum Communiqué’, Twenty-third South Pacific Forum, 8–9 July 1992, Honiara, Solomon Islands, p. 2. Accessed at: <<http://www.forumsec.org.fj/>> on 23/08/08.

⁸⁴ Barnett, ‘Global Warming and the Security of Atoll Islands’, p. 205.

B Sercombe and A Albanese, *Our Drowning Neighbours: Labor’s Policy Discussion Paper on Climate Change in the Pacific*, Australian Labor Party, 2006, p. 1. Accessed at: <www.anthonyalbanese.com.au/news/940/index.html> on 23/11/07.

⁸⁵ G Fry, *South Pacific Security and Global Change: The New Agenda*, working paper no. 1999/1 (Canberra: Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1999).

development progress will be undermined'.⁸⁶ To rephrase, unless countries like Australia provide assistance to Pacific nations, climate change will undoubtedly cause crippling poverty in the region.

Towards the end of the Howard Government's time in office, there was growing despair amongst the Australian electorate with the 'war on terror' and frustration with the government's fear-mongering towards refugees in particular. When combined with the increasing public awareness of climate change, this shift in the political landscape made it possible for Australia to play a constructive role in helping its neighbours deal with the impacts of the changing physical climate in the region and exposed a moral obligation to do so.

⁸⁶ Stern.

3. Human security: the Labor Party's promises

3.1 Introduction: a human security approach to the region

By the time the Rudd Government came to power in November 2007, it had already signalled a commitment to 'assisting our neighbours to adapt to the effects of climate change *now*, [and] to taking climate change refugees when countries are finally overcome by rising sea levels'.⁸⁷ In opposition, the ALP produced a number of policy documents that accepted the need for a threefold response to climate change in the Pacific, detailing plans to pursue mitigation on behalf of the region, stressing the importance of alleviating vulnerability through adaptation initiatives and stating a willingness to provide refuge to displaced people if necessary. In addition to this, Labor reaffirmed a commitment to Pacific development and wellbeing.

This 'human security' centred approach promoted by the ALP suggested a less adversarial and more cooperative option for dealing with the threats posed by climate change. It marked a fundamental departure from the Howard Government's more self-interested security rhetoric and the veiled and defensive approach to climate change in the region that this entailed. The Labor Party, in opposition and as the new Australian Government, argued that its view was not only more attuned to the realities of global warming in the Pacific but also promised better long-term prospects for both Australia's security interests and those of its neighbours. Unsurprisingly, Pacific leaders welcomed the recognition of Pacific vulnerability and the moderating of claims that the Pacific somehow threatened Australia.

3.2 Seeing climate change through a human security lens

Broadly speaking, human security is primarily concerned with protecting the wellbeing of humans. It means:

First, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs, or in

⁸⁷ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 4 (original emphasis).

communities ... [H]uman security is people centred. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities, and whether they live in conflict or peace.⁸⁸

The applicability of a broad human-security framework to climate-change impacts has found increasing expression over the past decade.⁸⁹ The UNDP's *Human Development Report 2007/2008* was dedicated entirely to bringing the human security concept to bear upon climate change.⁹⁰ At the centre of this perspective lies the tragic irony that the people least responsible for creating climate change will be the most adversely affected by it.

Pacific Island countries bear this irony out. Having made a negligible contribution to climate change, they will suffer a disproportionately large measure of its consequences. Insofar as the cause can be linked to the consumption habits and political choices of the developed world, it is Australia, the highest per capita GHG emitter in the world,⁹¹ which bears a far greater responsibility for the changing climate in the Pacific. The effects of climate change on a region already beset by major socioeconomic and physical vulnerabilities will cripple efforts to achieve the MDGs, such as gender equality and sustainability, which have become so central to the international development agenda.⁹² The human-security framework prioritises the welfare of the most

⁸⁸ UNDP, *Human Development Report, 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 23.

⁸⁹ Barnett, 'Titanic states?';
Barnett, 'Adapting to Climate Change in Pacific Island Countries';
O'Brien;
Oxfam International, *Adapting to Climate Change: What's needed in poor countries, and who should pay?*, Oxfam briefing paper, 2007. Accessed at
<http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/briefingpapers/bp104_climate_change_0705> on 23/06/08;
SPREP, *Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change*.

⁹⁰ UNDP, 'Fighting Climate Change'.

⁹¹ CSIRO, *CO₂ emissions increasing faster than expected*, media release, 22 May 2007. Accessed at:
<<http://www.csiro.au/news/GlobalCarbonProject-PNAS.html>> on 12/08/08.

⁹² P Abeygunawardena et. al. (2003). *Poverty and Climate Change: Reducing the Vulnerability of the Poor through Adaptation*, collaborative paper by UNDP, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others, 2003, p. 12. Accessed at: <<http://www.undp.org/climatechange/adap01.htm>> on 10/08/08.

environmentally insecure over the demands of national security and is far more meaningful to Pacific nations.⁹³

3.3 The ALP in opposition: a new stance on climate change and the Pacific

During its last years in opposition, Labor made a political issue out of contrasting the scientific consensus regarding climate change and its devastating effects on the region's most vulnerable people with Howard's denial and securitisation. In January 2006, Bob Sercombe, Shadow Minister for Overseas Aid and Pacific Island Affairs, and Anthony Albanese, Shadow Minister for Environment and Heritage and Water, wrote an ALP discussion paper provocatively titled *Our drowning neighbours*.⁹⁴ It took clear aim both at the Howard Government's climate-change denialism and its ignorance of the region's vulnerability. Recognising the potential for climate change to seriously destabilise the Pacific region, the discussion paper called for aggressive GHG mitigation policies and a strategic approach to adaptation and development appropriate to climate-change requirements.⁹⁵ The paper went on to argue that Australia has both the responsibility and the capacity to safeguard the wellbeing of its neighbours from the most devastating impacts of the changing climate.

Our drowning neighbours made it clear that 'Australia should, as part of an international coalition, do its fair share to accept climate-change refugees'⁹⁶ and play a role in creating an effective regime for resettling Pacific Islanders. Labor vigorously criticised the Howard Government's then Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Ian Campbell, because he dismissed suggestions that Australia might take some of those displaced by climate change as an 'absurdity', equivalent to 'pulling the doona up' and giving in because climate change had become 'all too hard'.⁹⁷ The ALP, by

⁹³ J Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001) p. 122.

⁹⁴ Sercombe and Albanese.

⁹⁵ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 7.

⁹⁶ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 10.

⁹⁷ I Campbell as quoted in 'Govt. rebuffs climate refugee proposal', *ABC News Online*, 5 January 2006. Accessed at: <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2006/01/05/1542508.htm>> on 14/08/08.

contrast, accepted that ‘in time, it is likely that one or more Pacific Island countries will have to be completely evacuated’.⁹⁸

Recognising the urgency of forced climate migration, the ALP stated that ‘Australia needs to work with our Pacific neighbours to prepare for such contingencies now’.⁹⁹ It seemed that Labor was preparing to tackle the difficult task of negotiating the national identity and security trenches the Howard Government had dug around the issue. This was a bold and undoubtedly onerous step, considering that much of the Australian electorate was clearly uncomfortable with the idea of accepting ‘others’ into its midst.

Leading up to the 2007 election, a related policy paper entitled *Federal Labor’s plan for International Development Assistance and Climate Change* was released in order to reiterate and solidify the ALP’s position on climate change in the Pacific. Written by the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Peter Garrett, and the Shadow Minister for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, the plan outlined the threat that climate change poses to the MDGs in the Pacific. It documented Labor’s belief that Australia as a rich developed nation should take seriously its international legal obligations under the UNFCCC to assist developing countries to adapt to changing climate conditions. It promised increased financial support for existing multilateral assistance programs such as the international Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund and \$150 million for regional adaptation.¹⁰⁰

In the context of Australia’s responsibility as a regional leader, the paper stated Labor’s intention to ‘take an international lead’ on mitigation.¹⁰¹ The plan defined by Garrett and McMullan outlines Labor’s belief that by immediately ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, Australia would ‘have a seat at the table’ for future global negotiations from where it would be able to push for mitigation on

⁹⁸ Sercombe and Albanese, p.10.

⁹⁹ Sercombe and Albanese.

¹⁰⁰ Garrett and McMullan.

¹⁰¹ Garrett and McMullan, p. 3.

behalf of the region.¹⁰² Further, it commits a Rudd Government to developing a specific ‘Pacific Climate Change Strategy’ which includes a ‘Pacific Climate Centre’ for scientific monitoring, ‘[a]ssistance for adaptation and emergency response efforts, including assistance with evacuations ...’ as well as a ‘Pacific Climate Change Alliance to add greater momentum to global efforts to deal with climate change’.¹⁰³

In addition to these two specific policy documents, the *National Platform and Constitution 2007* that came out of the 44th National ALP Conference in April 2007 enshrined much of this new human-security approach to both climate change and Australia’s relationship with its Pacific neighbours. Not only did the Platform and Constitution recognise the existence and gravity of climate change, it also ‘recognised that climate change could have a dramatic impact on the lives of people living in low-lying islands in the Torres Strait and the South Pacific’.¹⁰⁴ Again it underscored Australia’s responsibility to act on mitigation as a member of the world community and emphasised that assisting the Pacific in climate adaptation must form an integral part of Australia’s relationship with the region.¹⁰⁵ The document committed Labor once again to developing a Pacific Climate Change Strategy. It specified that such a strategy would include:

[E]stablishing an international coalition to accept climate change refugees when a country becomes uninhabitable because of rising seas [sic] levels, damage to coastal infrastructure or reduced food security and water supplies; assistance to preserve the cultural heritage of those who are evacuated; and establishing a Pacific Climate Change Alliance to add greater momentum to global efforts to deal with climate change ...¹⁰⁶

By acknowledging the critical nature of climate change for the Pacific in its national constitution, the ALP took an important step towards re-engagement with the region.

¹⁰² Garrett and McMullan.

¹⁰³ Garrett and McMullan, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Australian Labor Party, *National Platform and Constitution 2007*, ALP National Secretary (Canberra: 2007) p. 137.

¹⁰⁵ Australian Labor Party, p. 241.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Labor Party, p. 241–2.

Kevin Rudd's July 2007 speech at the Lowy Institute, 'Future Challenges in Foreign Policy', hinted that a 'fresh' approach to Australia's engagement with the region would be a key plank in a Labor Government's foreign policy platform. Recognising climate change as a major threat, Rudd attacked the existing security framework for dealing with 'the symptoms rather than the causes of much of the instability that we see across the region'.¹⁰⁷ In stark contrast to Howard's preference for policing 'our patch' unilaterally, in this speech Rudd revealed his plan for cooperative action through bilateral 'Pacific Partnerships' with island nations. He stated that his party did not see an irreconcilable contradiction between Australia's national interest and more considerate relations with its less-developed neighbours. Indeed, the ALP suggests that the former is better served in the long term by taking care of the latter.

Kevin Rudd was not elected *because* of his party's stated aims for helping the Pacific cope with climate change. Nevertheless, he came to power wielding promises of aggressive domestic and international action on climate change, cooperation with Pacific nations, adaptation assistance, a common regional identity and a focus on human security.

3.4 The ALP elected: promising the world to the Pacific

The early signs were promising. On 3 December 2007, as the new government's first official act, the Prime Minister ratified the Kyoto Protocol. In Rudd's own words, it was 'a significant step forward in our country's efforts to fight climate change domestically and with the international community'.¹⁰⁸ With this symbolic act, the government firmly placed climate change centre stage in Australia, a move that was met with much admiration and optimism around the world.

The new Australian Government accepted the overwhelming scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change, stating its

¹⁰⁷ K Rudd, 'Future Challenges in Australian Foreign Policy', speech to the Lowy Institute, 5 July 2007. Accessed at: <<http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=628>> on 05/05/08.

¹⁰⁸ Rudd, 'Future Challenges'.

belief in the probable consequences and the urgency with which the world would need to deal with the grave environmental challenge. By ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, the Australian Government gained a seat at the table in international negotiations and with it the potential to demonstrate the international leadership to which it claimed to aspire. The Prime Minister and the Minister for Climate Change both took part in the UNFCCC Negotiations in Bali that saw the adoption of the Bali Road Map, which includes the Bali Action Plan for post-Kyoto negotiations.

As well as these significant gestures on the international stage, the new government began rebuilding relationships in the region by acknowledging the threat climate change posed to the very survival of many people in the Pacific.¹⁰⁹ Rudd drew an explicit link between climate mitigation and the potential impacts of climate change in the region, claiming that meaningful action on climate-change mitigation by Australia was ‘the right thing to do’.¹¹⁰

In March 2008, Rudd visited PNG and announced the Port Moresby Declaration, which heralded a ‘new era of cooperation ... based on partnership, mutual respect and mutual responsibility’.¹¹¹ The Declaration defined climate change as a ‘common challenge’ and acknowledged that ‘[m]any of our Pacific neighbours, especially low lying atolls, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including devastation from more frequent and severe extreme weather events’.¹¹²

Whilst in PNG, Rudd also officially launched his plan for Pacific Partnerships and established the MDGs as the benchmark for regional progress.¹¹³ To date, bilateral partnerships have been entered into with the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa and Vanuatu. They commit Australia and the respective Pacific country to ‘work together to meet our common challenges, raise the standard of living for people throughout the region, and in

¹⁰⁹ Rudd, Doorstop interview.

¹¹⁰ Rudd, Doorstop interview.

¹¹¹ K Rudd, *Port Moresby Declaration*, media release, 6 March 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0118.cfm> on 03/01/09.

¹¹² Rudd, *Port Moresby Declaration*.

¹¹³ Rudd, *Port Moresby Declaration*.

particular to make more rapid progress towards our partners achieving the ... MDGs and their own development ambitions'.¹¹⁴

Rudd's symbolic trip to PNG was touted as an 'olive branch'.¹¹⁵ The Australian approach to Pacific security had, it seemed, drastically changed. Climate change was being discussed as a common threat and security as a 'comprehensive' endeavour. Quite explicitly, the 'arc of instability' that concerned the previous government has been transmuted into an 'arc of vulnerability'. The Port Moresby Declaration occurred within a broader shift in Australian geopolitical discourse whereby Rudd adopted a stance that positioned Australia as a willing member and friend *within* the Pacific¹¹⁶ rather than as a reluctant geographic neighbour and disciplinarian poised *above* the region. The Australian Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, pronounced it a 'breath of fresh air' in regional engagement.¹¹⁷

Under this new approach, help with minimising and adapting to climate-change impacts became a stated central focus of Australia's aid program. As part of a broader commitment to increase Australia's official development assistance, the 2008 Federal Budget was true to the promise of Peter Garrett and Bob McMullan, dedicating \$150 million of funds over three years to the task of meeting 'high priority [climate-change] adaptation needs'.¹¹⁸ This monetary commitment solidified the significant recognition by the Rudd Government of regional vulnerability and the inadequacy of existing mechanisms in Pacific Island countries to adapt to climate-changed conditions. On the whole, Pacific leaders expressed gratitude for the moves by the Rudd Government,

¹¹⁴ AusAID, 'Pacific Partnerships for Development', 2009. Accessed at <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/partnership.cfm> on 03/01/09.

¹¹⁵ Cordell.

¹¹⁶ See for example, Rudd, Doorstop interview.

¹¹⁷ S Smith, 'Joint Statement: 18th Papua New Guinea—Australia Ministerial Forum', with Sam Abal, Madang Resort Hotel, Madang, 23 April 2008. Accessed at www.dfat.gov.au/geo/png/18_forum_joint_statement.pdf on 21/05/08.

¹¹⁸ AusAID, *Australia's International Development Assistance Program 2008–09*.

including the promise of adaptation assistance,¹¹⁹ and representatives of NGOs welcomed the new sentiment regarding the serious nature of the human-security challenge imposed by climate change.¹²⁰

As well as budgetary preparations to help with adaptation, the Niue Declaration on Climate Change, signed by Prime Minister Rudd at the 2008 PIF meeting, was a significant statement of intent. Climate change was designated as the theme of the Forum meeting. The Forum Communiqué and the attendant Niue Declaration both couch discussions of climate change in unequivocal terms of urgency, threat, survival, vulnerability and security.¹²¹ The emphasis is on meaningful and regional cooperation towards the protection of wellbeing and societal health under the rubric of sustainable development. The contention is that ‘mainstreaming human security’ is necessary for the viability of the regional economic integration to which Australia is so committed.¹²²

Rudd joined with Pacific leaders to reiterate that climate change was a challenge ‘requiring a resolute and concerted international effort’.¹²³ The Declaration stressed the need for urgent action by the world’s major GHG emitting countries to set targets and make commitments to significantly reduce their emissions and to support the most vulnerable countries to adapt to and address the impacts of changed climate conditions.¹²⁴ Following this, international partners, including Australia, were implored to take ‘immediate and effective measures to reduce emissions, use cleaner fuels, and increase use of renewable energy sources’.¹²⁵ Australia’s support for this declaration seemed a far cry from Howard’s demand at the 1997 PIF meeting that climate change not be discussed.

¹¹⁹ PIF, *Forum Communiqué*, Thirty-Ninth Pacific Islands Forum, Niue, 19–21 August 2008, p. 14. Accessed at: <<http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/documents/other/>> on 23/08/08.

¹²⁰ de Tarczynski.

¹²¹ PIF.

¹²² PIF, p. 13.

¹²³ PIF, p. 23.

¹²⁴ PIF.

¹²⁵ PIF, p. 24.

3.5 Conclusion

When the ALP came to power in late 2007, it seemed that a new era of genuine and generous Australian concern regarding climate-change impacts in the Pacific was indeed at hand. The Rudd Government acted swiftly to reconcile with its neighbours, recognising the danger that climate change posed to regional stability. More importantly, in meeting this threat the need to provide aggressive domestic, regional and international leadership on emissions cuts was announced in the name of sparing the Pacific from potentially devastating impacts. Where these impacts were judged unavoidable, the ALP's new era of Pacific cooperation included impressive rhetoric and budgetary measures confirming Australia's obligation to provide adaptation assistance and ultimately resettlement for those displaced by rising seas and severe storms.

As Simon Dalby explains, '[W]ho we are, and what metaphors our political leaders can use to invoke discourses of danger, are unavoidably matters of popular geopolitics and practical geopolitical reasoning'.¹²⁶ In this sense, the Rudd Government's attempt to relocate Australia *within* the Pacific, to concede the threat posed by climate change to that region's human security and to portray the burden as 'shared', implied an inclusive and optimistic version of geopolitical reasoning.

Now, more than halfway through its first term, it is time to assess the new government's performance in realising these laudable beginnings. Unfortunately, as the promises have begun to fade, Australia's concrete actions to address a climate-changed Pacific now look as if Foreign Minister Smith's claim of 'a breath of fresh air' in the relationship may be all there is to them. As is often the case with political rhetoric, the gap between promise and practice is beginning to look wider than the government is willing to admit.

¹²⁶ S Dalby, *Environmental Security* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 165.

4. Raising the white flag? The Rudd Government's performance

4.1 Introduction: all rhetoric no action

Labor in opposition had promised international pressure for climate-change mitigation, espoused a human-security-focused agenda and expressed a genuine desire for cooperation with its neighbours, and its election to government in 2007 encouraged the island nations of the Pacific to believe that their fortunes had turned. The new Prime Minister appeared to understand the gravity of the region's plight and promised to engage it in a spirit of shared responsibility. Pacific leaders were given cause to believe that, while international efforts to drastically reduce GHG emissions progressed, assistance with climate adaptation and forced migration would be high on Australia's regional agenda.

Over halfway into the government's first term, however, this optimism is beginning to look misplaced. After Labor's promising rhetoric in opposition and the government's symbolic early steps, there has been a disappointing lack of real action. Having announced its intention to limit Australia's emissions reduction to five per cent without international agreement and proposing a highly problematic emissions trading model, the government can no longer claim a leading, or even persuasive, role in international mitigation negotiations. The expectation of significant mitigation and the concomitant necessity of planning seriously for adaptation can no longer be honestly presented as an option to Pacific nations. At the same time, the \$150 million adaptation assistance pledged by the Rudd Government is looking increasingly inadequate. And far from the strong stance it took in opposition, Labor now literally refuses even to speak about the issue of forced migration let alone 'prepare for such contingencies *now*' as it promised.¹²⁷ It seems that after a brief period of hope, Australia is again failing as a neighbour.

¹²⁷ Sercombe and Albanese, p.4 (original emphasis).

4.2 The CPRS and Australia's mitigation targets

Much has been made by the current government of the need for action on mitigation before serious adaptation measures and migration options are canvassed. As explained in the previous chapter, the commitment to act on mitigation was made not only at Bali, where Australia presented itself as a responsible international actor before the rest of the world, but also to its neighbours at the PIF where it assumed the mantle of a capable leader and regional representative. However, after an auspicious start, which included ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, it seems that the Rudd Government's ambitions concerning mitigation have been overwhelmed by domestic political concerns.

In December 2008, the Australian Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) was announced and committed Australia by 2010 to an emissions trading scheme with an unambitious emissions reduction target of five per cent, rising to 15 per cent if the rest of the world was deemed by the Australian Government to have 'done its bit'. This timid range was inconsistent with the advice received by the government's own climate-change adviser, Professor Ross Garnaut, who suggested that a 25 per cent target was necessary to ensure Australia as an effective participant in the international negotiations.¹²⁸

In May 2009, amidst heavy criticism from a number of stakeholders comprising industry, the environmental movement, the Opposition, the Greens and the independents, the government announced a raft of changes to the proposed CPRS, which included delaying the start of the scheme until July 2011 and amending the emissions reduction target to between five and 25 per cent. While a 25 per cent reduction is far more closely in line with the scientific consensus, this upper limit will only be adopted in the unlikely event of an ambitious international agreement at the UNFCCC 15th Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in December 2009. This

¹²⁸ R Garnaut, *Garnaut Climate Change Review: Final report* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Accessed at: < <http://www.garnautreview.org.au/index.htm> > on 10/09/08.

agreement would need to commit to stabilising carbon dioxide levels at 450 parts per million or fewer by 2050.

Rudd has admitted that negotiations for an international agreement at Copenhagen are not on track. And further, that the current global economic crisis has made the negotiations more difficult and reduced the likelihood of a good environmental outcome.¹²⁹ Indeed, it seems that the real reasons for the proposed changes to the domestic emissions trading scheme have very little to do with increasing good environmental outcomes and instead are focused on maintaining business certainty and solid economic growth in these turbulent financial times. However, as Kiribati's Prime Minister, Anote Tong, reminds us, '[I]t's not an issue of economic growth, it's an issue of human survival'.¹³⁰

Australia has failed to fulfil the promises contained in the *National Platform and Constitution 2007* and *Federal Labor's plan for International Development Assistance and Climate Change* to establish a 'Pacific Climate Change Alliance' in order to add momentum and pressure on mitigation negotiations. Indeed, the Rudd Government's proposed CPRS demonstrates that Australia's current stance on mitigation could not be further from that demanded by the Pacific nations and enshrined in the Niue Declaration to which Rudd was an enthusiastic signatory. The urgent need for adaptation planning must therefore be assessed in the context of the Rudd Government's actions to date, not its lofty rhetoric on the need to achieve mitigation.

4.3 The lack of true adaptation assistance

If tough mitigation targets were to be adopted tomorrow, serious and prolonged adaptation measures would remain necessary across the Pacific. This is because both sea level and temperatures will continue to rise for centuries 'due to the time scales associated with climate processes and feedbacks, even if

¹²⁹ M Grattan and T Arup, 'Climate shaded by economy', *The Age*, 28 March 2009.

¹³⁰ Quoted in 'Kiribati likely doomed by climate change: President', *ABC News*, 6 June 2008. Accessed at <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/06/2266607.htm>> on 10/08/08.

greenhouse gas concentration were to be stabilised'.¹³¹ Because aggressive global mitigation is unlikely in the near future, adaptation becomes more imperative than ever. Massive infrastructure changes need to be made urgently in order to efficiently reduce the economic, social, developmental and environmental cost of climate-change impacts.

Strengthening adaptation efforts in the Pacific was a central pillar of the Rudd Government's plan for regional engagement¹³² and to this end Labor announced \$150 million for Pacific adaptation prior to the 2007 election. The Federal Budget of 2008 did follow through in this regard; as part of a broader commitment to increase Australia's official development assistance, \$150 million of funds was pledged over three years to the task of meeting 'high priority [climate-change] adaptation needs'.¹³³ This financial commitment appeared to back up the Rudd Government's acknowledgement of the region's vulnerability and the inadequacy of existing mechanisms in Pacific Island countries to adapt to a climate-changed regime.

While the commitment of \$150 million to support adaptation in the Pacific appears to be a significant advance on the policy of the previous government, the details governing the operation of the policy serve to undermine the current government's apparent generosity of spirit. Unfortunately, the conditions placed on the funding, including the delay to spending much of it and the expansion in the scope of projects that now appear to be covered, render this commitment increasingly marginal. In contrast to the assistance Labor promised, when in opposition, to help Australia's neighbours as part of a 'Pacific Community',¹³⁴ government spending in 2008–09 will make very little difference to Pacific communities preparing for impending climate-change effects.

¹³¹ IPCC, p. 16;
See also, Richardson et. al., *Synthesis Report*, p.10

¹³² Rudd, Doorstop interview.

¹³³ AusAID, *Australia's International-Development Assistance Program 2008–09*.

¹³⁴ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 3.

The 2008 Federal Budget allocated only \$35 million of the \$150 million in 2008–09.¹³⁵ Of this, \$15 million was extracted from existing aid money with \$20 million representing new funds. Drawing a significant amount of the funds from the existing aid budget as the Rudd Government has done is an inappropriate reallocation of resources that are already stretched. It is contrary to the pleas of many NGOs in the international aid sector and the advice from the Garnaut report, both of which call for climate-change assistance to be additional to, not part of, existing aid budgets.¹³⁶

The \$150 million has already drawn heavy criticism from several organisations for being grossly inadequate. Oxfam predicts that Australian Government funding required for adaptation initiatives to succeed is in the order of \$300 million a year.¹³⁷ The Make Poverty History coalition of over 60 aid agencies, community groups and religious organisations have called on the Rudd Government to commit to \$300 million of adaptation funding to developing countries in 2008–09, ‘scaling up to \$1.7 billion per annum by 2015’.¹³⁸ In comparison to these figures, the \$20 million of guaranteed new money in the 2008–09 Budget is looking like a very small drop in the ocean.

Quite apart from the question of the adequacy of the amounts pledged, it is perhaps of most concern that the money has not been restricted to adaptation-specific projects. Substantial amounts of the 2008–09 funding are being allocated to scientific and capacity-building programs and, although important, these are manifestly not adaptation. According to AusAID, the aim of the

¹³⁵ It is proposed that the rest of the pledged \$150 million will be distributed as \$49.4 million in new funds in the 2009–10 Budget and \$65 million in new funds in the following year. See Australian Treasury, *Budget 2008–09*, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.budget.gov.au/>.

¹³⁶ Garnaut, *Final report*, p. 317; Oxfam International, *Turning Carbon into Gold*, Oxfam Briefing Paper 123, December 2008, p. 6. Accessed at: <http://www.oxfam.org.au/media/files/OI-Nov08-finance-for-adaptation.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Oxfam Australia, *More money needed to help Pacific cope with climate change*, media release, 29 August 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.oxfam.org.au/media/article.php?id=504>.

¹³⁸ Make Poverty History, *See the bigger picture, act on climate change. Australian action on climate change: A guide for Garnaut and the government*, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.makepovertyhistory.com.au/getdoc/5e81351c-4db8-4a97-8a17-07f600633d79/Report_ClimateChange.aspx.

government's adaptation initiative is to 'improve the information basis for appropriate climate change responses ... and improve the capacity of developing country partners to access donor sources of adaptation funding and manage adaptation activities'.¹³⁹ To this end, the funding priorities are 'scientific information for policy and planning', which 'will enhance the information base for planning adaptation responses and effectively implementing adaptation support' and '[i]nvestments in better risk information', which 'will build on current Australian climate prediction/monitoring investments'.¹⁴⁰

It is only after funding this scientific research and capacity building that money is left for 'contributions to major multilateral adaptation funds',¹⁴¹ which may advance on-the-ground adaptation activities. The government's priorities are decades out of date. There is international consensus that the world is past the point of needing further research and there is a limit to the usefulness of scientific predictions no matter how accurate; what is needed now is action. What is certain is that, due to a combination of environmental degradation, population pressures and ocean events, the habitability of low-lying areas is now becoming more marginal. Climate change will exacerbate this threat. For water-permeable coral landmasses and islands with highest points only metres above sea level, the admirable academic endeavour of predicting the exact magnitude of sea-level rise is incidental to taking concrete steps to prepare for it. Scientific research and capacity building are certainly endeavours worth funding but not from an already meagre pool of money that is publicised as being for adaptation assistance.

Further, there is no indication of the geographical limits that may apply to the dissemination of the \$150 million of adaptation assistance. Although a geographic focus on Pacific neighbours is implied, in fact the fund exists 'to meet high priority climate change

¹³⁹ AusAID, 'Adaptation to Climate Change Initiative', July 2008. Accessed at: http://ausaid.gov.au/keyaid/adaptation_initiative.cfm

¹⁴⁰ AusAID, 'Adaptation to Climate Change Initiative'.

¹⁴¹ AusAID, 'Adaptation to Climate Change Initiative'.

adaptation needs in vulnerable countries in our region'.¹⁴² All the countries in our region, with the exception of New Zealand, exhibit significant vulnerability. Given the votes required for the Prime Minister to achieve his stated goal of gaining Australia a seat in the UN Security Council by 2013, it is not inconceivable that there might be political temptations to include South-East Asia and even some African nations in 'our region' for the purposes of that adaptation fund. It is instructive in this regard that AusAID has recently expanded its aid program to include Africa after a long period of omission.¹⁴³ Whilst it would be a useful step to fund climate-change adaptation in Africa, it is vital that Australia ensures first and foremost that the adaptation needs of its Pacific neighbours are fully met before expanding the scope with a view to further diplomatic gain.

4.4 Migration: the elephant in the room

Assessments of the impacts of climate change conclude that sea-level rise, associated coastal degradation, salinisation and severe flooding *will* lead to the displacement of people in the Pacific.¹⁴⁴ The Prime Minister of Tonga, addressing the 2008 UN General Assembly, stated in unequivocal terms that '[t]he prospect of climate refugees from some of the Pacific Island Forum countries is no longer a prospect but a reality, with relocations of communities due to sea level rise already taking place. Urgent action must be taken now'.¹⁴⁵

Outlined in the *National Platform and Constitution 2007* and *Our drowning neighbours*, Labor's commitments to establish an international coalition to accept 'climate change refugees'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² AusAID, 'Adaptation to Climate Change Initiative'.

¹⁴³ AusAID, 'Africa and Middle East', July 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/africa.cfm>.

¹⁴⁴ IPCC, p. 708;
Brown;
Barnett, *Adapting to Climate Change in Pacific Island Countries* ;
Garnaut, *Draft report*, p. 192.

¹⁴⁵ UN News Service, 'Climate change threatens international peace, Pacific Island States tell UN debate', 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28318&Cr=general+assembly&Cr1=debate>.

¹⁴⁶ Australian Labor Party, p. 242;
Sercombe and Albanese, p. 4.

seemed to accept the urgency of this proposition. Unfortunately, no action has been taken to honour this commitment. In fact, since the election, the issue of forced migration has been met with silence from Labor politicians. For all its rhetoric aimed at creating a sense of regional unity with Pacific Islanders, the Rudd Government has thus far been at pains to avoid any discussions about allowing those displaced by climate change to live in Australia if resettlement becomes necessary. In justifying his government's apparent backflip on the issue, Rudd claimed that to do so would be akin to 'haul[ing] up the white flag and saying it's all too late'.¹⁴⁷ Instead of planning for the worst, it appears that Australia would prefer to act as a conduit for Pacific concerns by providing leadership on forging an international emissions reduction agreement and pursuing effective adaptation strategies. If this were a genuine commitment, it would be admirable.

However, as discussed above, only a short time after the Niue Declaration the Rudd Government effectively raised the white flag on a workable climate-change agreement. Its emissions trading scheme does nothing to shield Pacific communities from the probable disaster of rising seas and the adaptation assistance offered is not commensurate with the impending threat. It is to be hoped that its apparent choosing to renege upon commitments made to Australia's Pacific neighbours might have led the government to develop a plan to reassure these people that they had not simply been cut adrift in the rising seas of Realpolitik

Former Greens Senator Kerry Nettle sought this reassurance in Senate Estimates in February 2008. It was confirmed, however, that 'there are currently no specific criteria that would allow the entry of a person purely on the grounds that they were displaced by climate change'.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) admitted that it had no plans to consider the impacts of climate change on people movement, nor any effects upon, nor possible roles for, Australia in the regional

¹⁴⁷ Rudd, Doorstop interview

¹⁴⁸ Commonwealth, *Estimates*, Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 19 February 2008, p. 81.

context. The Departmental Secretary then went on to explain that the department was not conducting any research into the issue and, indeed, confided that ‘we are rather strapped for funds for research at the moment’.¹⁴⁹ When questioned again later in the year, DIAC had not progressed noticeably; the only action it had undertaken was a ‘literature survey’ on climate migration.¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to understand how a literature survey, well into the new government’s term, constitutes working ‘with our Pacific neighbours to prepare for such contingencies *now*’ as was promised in 2006.¹⁵¹

The Deputy Secretary responsible for the Migration, Refugee, Citizenship and Compliance Group in DIAC, Peter Hughes, attempted to explain this lack of action in October 2008:

I think the general view that has emerged about climate change displacement is that, first and foremost, the activities of governments ought to be aimed at mitigation of the climate change factors that might displace people, adaptation within countries where that is possible—and internal relocation could be part of the adaptation process—and, lastly, as a last resort, if needed, international resettlement as a response.¹⁵²

Once again, the government’s approach has slipped way behind the realities of climate change. Forced migration is already occurring and it will continue to do so. Considering the pitiful progress taken by Australia and indeed the world on mitigation and adaptation, it should be a source of acute embarrassment to the government that one of the most senior policymakers in the field thinks that displacement is not already a pressing issue. As discussed in Chapter 1, migration is not the preference of most Pacific Islanders but it has become a very real part of the debate. It can no longer be seen as attributable only to failed adaptation; it needs to be considered as one of the possible adaptive responses

¹⁴⁹ Commonwealth, *Estimates*, 19 February 2008, p. 82.

¹⁵⁰ Commonwealth, *Estimates*, Senate, Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 28 May 2008, p. 43;
Commonwealth, *Estimates*, Senate, Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 21 October 2008, p. 33.

¹⁵¹ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 10 (original emphasis).

¹⁵² Commonwealth, *Estimates*, 21 October 2008, p. 32.

and, at times, the only one.¹⁵³ The international community must react accordingly and begin making difficult decisions around statehood, the right to nationality and the appropriate humanitarian answers to this distressing situation.

Australia must be prepared to play a role in the relocation of migrants forced to leave their homes because of climate change. Capacity for internal relocations between low-lying atoll islands or within the entire Pacific region is very limited; the financial and social resources available to support migrants are restricted even among the bigger islands and those with higher terrains. The added socioeconomic burden of an increased population is contradicted for countries already struggling and failing, by and large, to meet MDGs. Further, it is both arrogant and ignorant to assume that it is more appropriate for Pacific Islanders to relocate to other countries within the Pacific rather than to Australia.

The Rudd Government's stated intention to recast Australia as *of* the region¹⁵⁴ is hollow if there is no inclination to accept those least secure *within* the region. A troubling double standard is at play. Australia is enthusiastic about economic integration and demands the free movement of capital and goods between the Pacific and its own shores but it denies the same freedom to human beings.¹⁵⁵ As Dobell explains, if Australia is to continue to claim such a special role in the Pacific, Pacific people must be given a place in Australia.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Brown, p. 10.

¹⁵⁴ D Kerr, 'Australia's Focus on the Pacific', speech to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute Defence and Security Luncheon, 17 April 2008. Accessed at: <
http://www.aspi.org.au/admin/eventFiles/080417%20Kerr%20ASPI%20Pacific%20_Final%20-%20as%20delivered_%20_2_.pdf> on 10/08/08.

¹⁵⁵ M Penjueli and W Morgan, 'What's so new about Rudd's Pacific policy?', *NewMatilda.com*, 19 September 2008. Accessed at: <http://newmatilda.com/2008/09/19/whats-so-new-about-rudds-pacific-policy> on 28/09/08. This article provides an excellent analysis of Rudd's push for closer economic integration with the Pacific and the similarities with Howard's free-trade policies.

¹⁵⁶ G Dobell, 'Australia and the Pacific's Lost Generation', *Quadrant*, 51:3, pp. 9–17. Accessed at: http://www.abc.net.au/international/projects/pdf/Quadrant_auspac_lostgeneration.pdf.

4.5 Conclusion

It is clear that in order to truly assist Pacific communities certain to face the brunt of disastrous climate-change impacts in coming years, Australia should:

- lobby aggressively in the international arena, as both leader and representative of the region, to mitigate climate change
- extend extensive adaptation assistance to vulnerable Pacific nations irrespective of any progress on international mitigation agreements
- position itself to ensure that, to the extent it appears necessary in the long run, forced climate migration is planned for and managed with compassion and regional cooperation.

The incoming Rudd Government promised progress on all of these issues and willingly accepted a great deal of credit for doing so. Thus it is unacceptable for the government now to have failed to make very much progress at all on *any* of these issues. They are interlinked and a lack of progress on any one of them raises the urgency of the other two.

The Australian Government has dealt with the Australian people and the world on the basis that aggressive mitigation is unlikely. It has then turned to face the Pacific and claimed that resettlement is inappropriate because it undermines mitigation efforts. Despite clear evidence that these claims together consign many Pacific communities to destructive environmental impacts, much publicised adaptation funding will not only be spread thinly across the region but will probably be spent largely on the superfluous task of establishing scientific certainty about a process that is already claiming victims.

These policy positions on mitigation and adaptation are at best incoherent and at worst duplicitous. The Rudd Government can no longer promote them simultaneously if it is to retain legitimacy for its claim to a new era of regional engagement. It needs to commit to strong mitigation, both domestically and as part of an international negotiating stance. Then it must turn again to the Pacific and enter into a franker discussion of the region's prospects and Australian intentions in a climate-changed future, particularly

in regard to forced migration. This would truly be a display of creative middle power leadership.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction: regional climate change and Australia's obligation to assist

Climate-change impacts will have a disastrous effect in the Pacific. Extreme weather events will become more commonplace, the sea level will rise, erosion will reduce arable land and salinisation will threaten the availability of freshwater. Scientists meeting in Copenhagen in March 2009, ahead of global negotiations in December, have confirmed that predictions documented in the 2007 IPCC Fourth Assessment Report are out of date and the situation is worse than previously thought.¹⁵⁷ Sea-level rise of one metre by 2100 is beginning to look conservative 'due to the growing contribution of ice loss from Greenland and Antarctica'.¹⁵⁸ The vulnerability of Pacific Island nations to this looming situation is well-established and for some time now the region has been seen as the canary in the climate-change coalmine. In future decades, the changing climate will see a decline in both human health and socioeconomic wellbeing as land, food and freshwater are lost and ultimately villages are forced to evacuate.

The nations of the Pacific cannot prepare for this situation alone, nor should they be expected to. Pacific nations do not have either the financial or adaptive capacity to build appropriate resilience to protect their citizens. Indeed, extreme poverty is steadily rising in parts of the Pacific and both economic performance and governance are seen as weak.¹⁵⁹ Progress towards the UN MDGs in the region has been described as 'heading in the wrong direction',¹⁶⁰ with some willing to characterise the state of affairs as endemic.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Richardson et. al., *Synthesis Report*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ Richardson et. al., *Synthesis Report*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ AusAID, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, Canberra, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/track_devgov.pdf on 21/08/08.

¹⁶⁰ Rudd, Doorstop interview.

¹⁶¹ H Hughes, 'Aid Has Failed the Pacific', *Issue Analysis No. 33*, Centre for Independent Studies, 7 May 2003. Accessed at: http://www.cis.org.au/issue_analysis/IA33/ia33.pdf.

Pacific communities will need to rely on assistance from developed countries like Australia if there is to be any hope of reducing the negative impacts of climate change upon the islands. Australia, as assumed regional leader, has both a moral and a legal obligation under the UNFCCC to assist.¹⁶² Furthermore, it is in Australia's national interest from both an economic and a traditional security perspective to do so. But, as this paper has documented, adequate assistance has not been forthcoming. Australia has long claimed to be a special friend of the Pacific nations but now, when there is an urgent need for deep cuts to emissions and significant adaptive measures including migration, the depth of the friendship is being tested.

5.2 Howard's legacy and Rudd's promises

The Howard Government sought to separate the issues of 'climate change' and 'security', largely denying the existence of the former and affording the latter an alarming prominence. For over a decade, John Howard encouraged a view of the Pacific as unstable and likely to compromise Australian territorial integrity if a hardline stance on governance and economic stability were not enforced. In addition, the Howard Government fostered a discourse of danger surrounding refugees for its own political gain. The resulting fearmongering, which saw comparisons between terrorists and Pacific Islanders forced to migrate because of climate change, moved Australia further away from displaying the will and the inclination to assist an increasingly desperate Pacific. The Howard Government's support of national security narratives that denied climate-change vulnerability in the region was a failure of imagination with serious consequences for those most truly insecure.

On the other hand, the ALP in opposition chose to conflate climate change and security and adopted a rhetoric of human security that linked regional instability and vulnerability to a development solution. By accepting the reality of the changing climate and the need for assistance in the Pacific, Labor sought to distance itself

¹⁶² UNFCCC, Article 4.4.

from the Howard Government, committing to international leadership on mitigation, the provision of significant adaptation assistance and the establishment of an international regime for the resettlement of those displaced by climate change. Upon its election, the Rudd Government announced a new era of cooperative neighbourly relations. The rhetoric was a powerful and a promising start that did much to repair the damage done to the Australian-Pacific relationship under Howard. Unfortunately, however, policy and practice have failed to uphold these symbolic gestures. To date, the Pacific has not witnessed any real improvement in climate mitigation or adaptation on Rudd's watch.

5.3 'It's time to lead'

In 2006, the ALP scolded the Howard Government for failing to show leadership on regional climate change and declared that it was 'time to lead again'.¹⁶³ It is now time for the Rudd Government to listen to its own demands and fulfil the promises that it made in opposition. If it is to regain the trust of the Pacific, it must:

- garner the necessary political will to enforce domestic emissions reductions and lobby internationally for aggressive mitigation targets
- guarantee the provision of targeted and meaningful, rather than diffuse and token, adaptation assistance to the region
- demonstrate leadership and compassion in formulating resettlement options for Pacific people displaced by climate change.

Mitigation

Australia must set carbon reduction targets that are far more ambitious, in line with the scientific consensus. As a senior CSIRO scientist has recently counselled, considering climate change as only one of the factors, along with the economy and other domestic concerns, when setting mitigation targets 'is like trying to negotiate

¹⁶³ Sercombe and Albanese, p. 3.

with a speeding train'.¹⁶⁴ By agreeing to aggressive emissions reductions before the Copenhagen negotiations in December 2009, Australia would be well-placed to provide international leadership and encouragement to China and other major developing countries reluctant to undertake deep cuts without concrete commitments from the developed world. To this end, the Rudd Government must fulfil its election promise and establish a 'Pacific Climate Change Alliance', allowing it to be part of a Pacific regional negotiation strategy on mitigation. By lending Australia's middle-power voice to the Pacific during international negotiations, the government would make a significant gesture towards supporting the region.

Adaptation

It is time to remove discussion of adaptive measures and the possibility of migration from the margins of mitigation considerations and recognise their absolute centrality to the future of the Pacific community. This paper has outlined the need to extend far more substantial adaptation assistance to the Pacific because of the predicted effects of climate change upon the UN MDGs to which the Rudd Government says it is so committed. In the words of Philipp Muller, the Marshall Islands' Ambassador to the UN, 'The current levels of funds for adaptation are grossly inadequate. We must put words into action and adaptation funds must be truly new funds'.¹⁶⁵ Labor must ensure that the remainder of the \$150 million first pledged in opposition is guaranteed for Pacific adaptation and is truly additional to the existing aid budget. In addition to this, the Rudd Government should commit a percentage of revenue from the CPRS to ongoing adaptation assistance and emergency relief in the Pacific as requested by international NGOs.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ As quoted in T Arup, 'Science ignored in climate targets', *The Age*, 13 April 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Pareti,.

¹⁶⁶ CDDR, p. 6.
Oxfam International, *Turning Carbon into Gold*.

Migration

This paper has established the need for the Australian Government to confront the issue of displacement caused by sea-level rise because, although resettlement of Pacific Islanders may be seen as an undesirable adaptation strategy of 'last resort', it is increasingly unlikely that any amount of adaptation assistance will avoid some degree of forced migration. It is in Australia's interest to confront the need for future migration now and to evaluate candidly and compassionately the potential for Australia to act as a destination. The Rudd Government must honour the commitment it made in opposition to establish an 'international coalition to accept climate refugees'.¹⁶⁷ DIAC must be tasked with investigating the establishment of a new sub-class to the humanitarian intake under the Migration Act, which could allow entry and residence for Pacific Islanders displaced by climate change and at risk of displacement. As life on some atoll islands becomes less viable, this contingency should be urgently addressed. As well as affording Pacific Islanders some dignity and control over their futures, staged migration would provide for better integration and be far less costly than emergency relocation in the future.

5.4 Conclusion

In August, Australia will host the 2009 meeting of the PIF in Cairns, Queensland, the first time the meeting has been held in Australia since 1994. Kevin Rudd has the opportunity to use his position as Chair to demonstrate Australia's capacity for real leadership on climate change. This is a timely opportunity for the Rudd Government to take a whole-of-government approach to mitigation and adaptation and direct practical and honest attention to the fate of a climate-changed Pacific. By honouring the commitments made in opposition, the Labor Party can move forward towards securing a better future for Pacific Island communities and, in turn, promote Australia's position as a regional leader. In order to do so, however, the government needs to enact deep emissions cuts at home, provide adequate adaptation assistance to the Pacific and look to the possibility of providing refuge for those displaced by

¹⁶⁷ Australian Labor Party, p. 242.
Sercombe and Albanese, p. 4.

climate change. By acting in good faith, the Rudd Government can show that for the Pacific region facing the devastating impact of climate change, Australia is more than just a fair-weather friend.

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