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Media release

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Screw You Tuvalu

The Australian Government has refused to consider pleas from the Tuvalu Government to accept environmental refugees displaced by rising sea-levels, despite New Zealand agreeing to a scheme to accommodate the exodus of Tuvaluans from 2002.

Speaking to Radio Australia, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock dismissed the world scientific consensus on sea-level rise as “speculation” and said that accepting environmental refugees from Tuvalu would be “discriminatory” and akin to a return to the White Australia Policy.

Senior Tuvalu official, Mr Paani Laupepa told the BBC last week:

“While New Zealand responded positively in the true Pacific way of helping one’s neighbours, Australia on the other hand has slammed the door in our face.

“Its justification is to compare Tuvaluans with the asylum seekers trying to enter Australia illegally.”

The Howard Government has said that it will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol despite the fact that Australia has the highest level of greenhouse gas emissions per person of any industrialised country, 30 per cent higher than the USA.

With a population of a little over 10,000 people, Tuvalu is a group of nine Pacific islands that sit no more than two to three metres above sea level. The latest UN report on climate change predicts sea-level rise of up to 95 centimetres by the end of the century. Tuvaluans say they are already being affected by coastal erosion, salt water intrusion affecting crops and an unusually high level of tropical cyclones.

“It’s too late for Tuvalu”, said Australia Institute Executive Director, Dr Clive Hamilton. “The Tuvaluans must now face the prospect of trying to preserve their history and culture while scattered in other lands. Their homeland will be only a memory. These facts appear to leave the flat-earthers of the Howard Cabinet cold.”

Other nations expected by the UN to face severe problems from sea-level rise include The Maldives, Kiribati, The Bahamas and Bangladesh. Leo Falcam, President of the Federated States of Micronesia has said that climate change “is nothing less than a form of slow death”.

See news.bbc.co.uk/1/English/sci/tech/newsid_1581000/1581457.stm and www.abc.net.au/ra