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The Shrinking Commonwealth

Climate Change Kept Off the Agenda

Australia faces accusations of bullying and mounting anger from Island nations at the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Coolumberr in Queensland for its part in keeping climate change off the meeting's agenda.

Australia Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton said today that the Howard Government had played an active role in ensuring climate change would not be on the CHOGM agenda.

"Australian Government officials have been telling Pacific states that sea level rise and climate change are not an issue," he said.

"This contradicts the Commonwealth's commitment to sustainable development. The effects of climate change present a perilous future for many Commonwealth states, Tuvalu and Kiribati in particular."

Dr Hamilton said many low-lying states were vulnerable not only from sea level rise but also from more intense tropical storms due to global warming.

"Australia is refusing to face reality," Dr Hamilton said. "The scientific evidence is overwhelming and no amount of obfuscation by the Government can change the facts."

He said the Government has frequently dismissed the concerns of Pacific island states by referring to the work of the National Tidal Facility, an AusAID-funded project that has been measuring sea levels in the Pacific since 1994.

"It is quite misleading to base conclusions about sea-level rise on a handful of measurements, especially when they contradict the overwhelming consensus of the world's most authoritative climate scientists," Dr Hamilton said.

He said Tuvalu reported to a World Summit on Sustainable Development seminar in New York last year that the Australian Government's own figures showed that in March 2001 the island had experienced its highest tide since recording had begun. In February 2001, it had experienced its second highest tide.

It was equally disturbing that the Australian Government had been reported as giving a frosty reception to Tuvaluan suggestions that Australia might have to take in environmental refugees from low lying Commonwealth states as the situation worsened.

Senior environmentalists from Commonwealth countries have organised a forum titled *The Commonwealth and Climate Change* to be held in Brisbane on Tuesday 26 February on the eve of CHOGM.

Contact: Clive Hamilton (02) 6249 6221 (bh) or 0413 993 223 (mob.)