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## News release

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# Blair: Climate Change Is CHOGM Issue

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's acknowledgement that climate change is an important issue for CHOGM because of the threat to Commonwealth nations from global warming was welcomed today by Australia Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

Asked about priority concerns that should be raised at the Coolom CHOGM this weekend Mr Blair agreed in an interview from London broadcast on the ABC's PM last night that climate change had serious ramifications for Commonwealth nations.

The British Prime Minister agreed that climate change should be a priority issue to be discussed at CHOGM.

"The British Prime Minister has a strong grasp of the potential of global warming and extreme weather patterns to adversely affect millions of Commonwealth citizens," said Dr Hamilton.

"Commonwealth countries in Asia and Africa face declining food production – up to 30 per cent on the Indian subcontinent – and the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

"Bangladesh, singled out in the Blair interview, faces the loss of up to 17 per cent of its productive land mass, and atoll countries like the Maldives and Tuvalu face the extinction of their entire cultures if sea levels rise as predicted.

"Britain's acknowledgement of this is in stark contrast to the host nation's callous indifference to the very real concerns of its Commonwealth guests. Australia has been reported to have actively worked to keep the issue off the CHOGM agenda and has discouraged Pacific nations from speaking out on their fears."

Dr Hamilton said the indecent haste with which the Howard Government signed an agreement with the US Bush Administration allying Australia to the US policy of refusing to sign the Kyoto Protocol was an affront to threatened Commonwealth nations.

"The so-called Australian/US Climate Action Partnership is the kind of vacuous package governments cobble together when they want to pretend they are doing something whilst actually doing nothing. And to sign it on the eve of a meeting at which countries with profound concerns have been discouraged from speaking out is an insult," he said.

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