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Media release

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Rising Seas to Shrink Commonwealth Games

The number of Commonwealth nations participating in the Commonwealth Games is expected to decline from 54 to 51 in coming decades as some small island states disappear under rising sea levels due to climate change, according to Dr Clive Hamilton, Executive Director of the Australia Institute.

Studies by leading climate scientists show that Tuvalu, the Maldives and Kiribati, all members of the Commonwealth, are particularly vulnerable. Plans are already underway to evacuate Tuvalu as rising seas destroy vegetable gardens, pollute fresh water supplies and threaten houses.

Sea level rise is also predicted to put millions of Commonwealth citizens at risk along the coasts of south and east Africa, the Indian sub-continent and South-East Asia.

Climate change is expected to reduce crop yields in most developing Commonwealth countries by up to 30 per cent by 2050, with food security in India, Pakistan and a number of African members severely jeopardized.

Of the 54 Commonwealth members, 27 are members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the international organisation pushing most strongly for cuts in greenhouse pollution.

Dr Hamilton welcomed Labor's proposed Pacific Climate Change Strategy, released today.

"At last someone is taking the plight of Pacific Islanders seriously", he said.

"The Federal Government has made its priorities clear; the commercial interests of the coal industry come first. The Government's chief economic adviser on climate change told a conference in London that it might be 'more efficient' to evacuate small island states subject to inundation rather than require industrialised countries like Australia to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions."

Australia has the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions of all industrialised countries, 25 per cent higher than the USA, and 20 times higher than most developing country members of the Commonwealth.

In 2001 officials from Tuvalu asked the Australian and New Zealand Governments to accept their citizens as migrants should rising sea levels render their country uninhabitable. However, according to the assistant secretary of Tuvalu's Ministry of Natural Resources, "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".