

# The Australia Institute's Inaugural Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum

**Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa**

Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa

**Gladys Habu**

Youth climate activist & UNICEF Pacific Ambassador from the Solomon Islands

**Richie Merzian**

Climate & Energy Program Director at The Australia Institute

*Hosted by*

**Ebony Bennett**

Deputy Director at The Australia Institute

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:03] G'day, everyone, I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome to the Australia Institute's inaugural Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum. Thanks so much for coming along today. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country and pay my respects to elders past and present and to the traditional owners, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never stated here. And this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. The Australia Institute has been hosting for almost 18 months now a series of these webinars, and you can find the details for those and upcoming webinars at our website. That's Australia Institute dot org. Got a year and just a few tips before we begin to help things run smoothly today. Apologies if you've heard all this before, if you've joined us, but there's always a few new people on the line. If you hover over the bottom of your Zoom screen, you should be able to see a queue and a function button where you can type in questions for our panellists. And you should also be able to upvote questions from other people, as well as make comments a reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat, or we'll have to boot you out. We don't do it very often, but we will if we have to. And finally, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and it will be posted up on the Australia Institute YouTube channel as soon as we can. After this has finished, that's Australia Institute TV. If you're searching for it, as mentioned today is all about climate and we are just waiting on the line for the prime minister to come on with us. My understanding is she's coming from a cabinet meeting, so hopefully she'll be released very shortly. But to kind of kick us off today, I guess really one of the big issues facing the whole globe apart from the global pandemic is obviously climate change. We're all in the lead up to the Glasgow Cup climate summit. And despite contributing little to global emissions, the Blue Pacific is really at the frontline of climate impacts, and Pacific island leaders have long called for more urgent and ambitious action on climate change, particularly from Australia, its neighbour. And we're only four weeks out from COP26. The international climate negotiations that will be happening in Glasgow and the parties will be expected to come to Glasgow with increased targets and ambitions. And for that's really for us to have any hope of achieving the Paris goal of limiting temperatures to one point five degrees today. We are privileged to have as our special guest the

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Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, the Prime Minister of Samoa, and we also welcome Gladys Habibie, youth climate activists from the Solomon Islands. He's passionate about amplifying the voice of Pacific island states on regional and international stages, as well as our own Richie Museum director of the Australia Institute's Climate and Energy Programme. Richie is a former Australian government representative to the UN climate negotiations, so he's been to more than his fair share of of cops in his day. I'm just checking back in. We still don't have the prime minister just yet, but hopefully won't be too long before she's joining us. Richie, before we begin, and while we're waiting for the prime minister to join us, I just wonder if you could set the stage for us for COP26. We're four weeks out from Glasgow. What are we expecting from the Pacific and from the Australian government in particular?

**Richie Merzian** [00:03:48] Thank you, Ebony. So COP26 is a particularly important UN climate conference, these conferences happen every year. But what makes this one important or more important than usual, is that it represents sort of the five year mark following the Paris Agreement five years. Obviously, it was last year, but much like the Olympics has been pushed a year. But that five year mark is important because it's a good opportunity to take stock and to see if we are on track to avoiding dangerous climate change and what we know from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change through its sixth assessment report that was released earlier this year is that we're not on track. Regardless of of how much action we do take, we will inevitably hit 1.5 degrees of global warming, and that is supposed to be the limit that we set in the Paris Agreement. In fact, the reason we have that 1.5 degree mark is because of the leadership of Pacific island countries in pushing for that to be the limit to be the target. And unfortunately, the update is that we're going to surpass that. And so it is more important than ever that we all take stock in every country, particularly large emitters. Look at what they can do to increase their efforts in the short term. The targets that were put forward ahead of the Paris Agreement need to be increased. Fortunately, you've seen many large emitters do that. The United States and President Biden held a summit in April and at that summit announced that the US would half its emissions. The UK will reduce its emissions by 68 percent, the EU 55 percent, Canada 40 per cent, Japan 46 percent. So we've seen a number of developed countries to take that leadership on board, increase their short term targets. That's what COP26 is all about, and that's what we're hoping to see from the Australian government as well. It will be particularly interesting is the role of Pacific island countries play, and hopefully that's well timed with Prime Minister Mustafi's arrival on our inaugural forum on my pots back to you, if any.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:05:50] Yeah, thank you. I can say that the Prime Minister has joined us now. Thank you so much for joining us. I might just hand over to our executive director, Ben Oquist, to formally introduced the Prime Minister of Samoa. Thanks, Ben.

**Ben Oquist** [00:06:08] Thank you, Ebony, and thank you, Richie, for that impromptu stage setting of where we're at. It's actually important to know about the moment that we're in and the huge implications of all our actions in the lead up to Glasgow and in particular the leadership of the Pacific. So it was with great delight today to be joined by the Prime Minister of the independent state of Samoa, the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa. The honourable matter. I had a long career representing the Samoan people in government office. She has spent 30 years in cabinet, most recently serving as the Minister for Natural Resources and the Environment, where she showed strong leadership on climate change and environmental concerns representing her country at past climate change conferences like the one coming up in Glasgow. During a time in the portfolio, she launched the Samoans Women in Climate Change Initiative, which she is now

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the patron, bringing together female leaders from the public, private and non-government sectors across Samoa. Now, as the newly elected first female prime minister of Samoa, her leadership is integral to the future of our region, indeed the planet. Pacific nations have long been vital in leading, ambitious action on climate change, and this year will be no different. In her recent address to the UN General Assembly, the prime minister noted the importance of the upcoming COP26 negotiations as a point of no return and called on big polluters to demonstrate more commitment and leadership. Prime Minister and I watched your speech again this morning. Your talk of climate crisis, the existential threat, the need to halve emissions this decade, the need to end coal was a clarion call for the planet. Your calm presence, your authority, your humanity, your future vision shone through, delivering the type of speech that many Australians can only dream. Our government leaders would deliver with the Pacific region on the frontline of climate impacts a strong leadership from people like yourself. Must be front and centre in driving ambition and determining the path in this the decisive decade for climate, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Australia Institute's webinar and invite you to give your address. Thank you, Prime Minister.

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:08:41] Thank you, Mr Ben Oquist, director of the Australian Institute, Miss Ebony Bennett, deputy director, Australian Institute, fellow panellists, ladies and gentlemen, I think the Australia Institute for this invitation. This platform allows me to discuss an issue that was already a key priority for our region since I first became a parliamentarian in the 1980s. The forum then already expressed concerns about the climatic changes in the Pacific and recognised the serious social and economic disruptions it has for our region. Currently, the region has declared climate change as the single greatest threat to livelihoods, security and well-being of the people of the Pacific. We have redefined the concept of security through the Boyett Declaration on regional security, providing an expanded concept that better reflects our security concerns. This shows the centrality of addressing climate change and defining our regional approach and identifying our national priorities and influencing our foreign policy. In our recent regional meeting, for example, we even adopted a declaration that would help secure our maritime zones against the threat of climate change related sea level rise. This ensures the preservation of our existing rights and entitlements stemming from the maritime zones for many of our coastal dwellers king tides invading their homes. They can only watch the sea creep closer to sea level is expected to continue to rise a challenge for an island with the vast majority of people and infrastructure exposed to the sea along its coastline. Over the course of the 21st century, the global climate model predictions and climate science findings, for example, indicate air temperature and sea surface will. Increase by 20 30. More severe and frequent cyclones increase in rainfall intensity, leading to more flooding and ocean acidification will continue to impact the health of our reef ecosystems. We have all heard about the recent IPCC reports and the unliveable predictions. If we do not get our act together. It is no surprise, therefore, that climate change has continued to be a core priority and policy consideration for all our decisions across all sectors of our sustainable development. Samoa's enhanced climate change actions indicate our commitment to be part of the solution. Despite our significant greenhouse gas emissions. Some of the important national climate actions taken include, firstly, the 2020 10, the summer climate change policy. It provides a clear national mandate for the coordination of climate change policies and actions, our policy aims to strengthen our whole of government approach to empower a whole of society response to climate change. Secondly, someone has submitted its second nationally determined contributions, where we have increased ambition by including an economy wide emissions reduction target. It also highlights important adaptation measures that are critical for building resilience. The NDC implementation roadmap and NDC investment plan will include

adaptation targets and gender responsive considerations in the form of guidelines for promoting gender and social inclusion. Despite the COVID 19 situation, we spare no effort in ensuring we are on track to meet our Paris Agreement target of 100 per cent renewable by 2025. Thirdly, securing climate financing is key to our efforts to implement our empty seats and especially as our transition will be dependent on new and resilient infrastructures, technologies shifts towards green buildings, climate proofed roads and protection of local community assets. Samoa has continued to successfully secure climate finance. The challenge is to ensure that implementations are Typekit and impactful in building resilience. Climate finance allows us to develop, for example, a green climate fund, NPF funded flood management and control scheme for the Bisignani catchment area, which covers the Central Business District. Funding to support community integrated management plans with adaptation interventions for district and community levels is also important. There are also health surveillance systems developed to monitor flood related health issues. Lastly, Samoa is part of the science, not science campaign, promoting efforts to end action in line with the findings of the IPCC 1.5 Degrees Celsius special report. We believe the science is important in the long term planning. We all need to take in order to avoid the crisis situation we now find ourselves in at the national level. We are updating our GHG inventory and energy registry and finalising Samoa's third national communication and latest state of the environment reports. It isn't relevant for Samoa. We cannot discuss COVID 19 recovery days, building back better or plan for the next 10 years without addressing climate change, this time next month. The world will be gathering in Glasgow. The commitments to be made at this meeting is crucial. Glasgow, therefore, could be the point of no return. Hence, we must continue to push and demand more ambitious and urgent climate action from everyone. The leaders of the Pacific have appointed political climate champions that will lead our engagement on some of our core issues and concerns at the upcoming COP26 negotiations. These include climate ambition, environmental integrity, climate finance, loss and damage. And, of course, oceans. Well, we understand the challenges with COVID 19 that all our countries are facing. We cannot use that to delay global climate action. The situation emphasises the need to invest in COVID 19 recovery that are climate smart and in line with a low emissions development pathway. The development of COVID 19 vaccines was the fastest in history. It's rollout around the world at large scale required a massive global coordinated effort. I often ponder on how we can push for this historical United urgent global response. At the same massive scale to help us reach the 1.5 degree Celsius promise of the Paris Agreement for us as the Blue Pacific, we need to inject some of that urgency and ambitious actions like what we have achieved with COVID 19 vaccinations to deliver the needed climate action. All major emitters need to urgently commit to strong climate action, even with recent ambitious and Denniss missions. The emissions gap is worrisome and still puts us on a catastrophic pathway of about two degrees of global heating. We need to push for cutting emissions in half by 2030 to help reach carbon neutrality by mid-century. The necessary climate finance to help developing countries to meet their ambitious and ambitious cuts must be made available. Keep in the US 100 billion promise. It is important, therefore, for global mitigation efforts. We continue to call for a scaled up climate financing for adaptation and dedicated financing for loss and damage. Well, we called for COP26 to conclude negotiations on the Paris rulebook. It is important that it adopts a market mechanism which delivers meaningful global emissions reductions. We must ensure that we continue to uphold the principle of environment, environmental integrity and keep the Paris Agreement promise. This is key for the region when finalising COP26 outcomes. Lastly, but not least, the ocean absorbs nearly a quarter of annual CO2 emissions and plays a central role in regulating the Earth's climate. Therefore, ocean needs to feature more in the wake of even if triple sea. This is an important priority for the Pacific. Our Asia slogan of 1.5 to stay alive remains relevant now more than ever, all of the issues listed as priorities

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for the Pacific island. Back to that, we need a 1.5 degree world. We need the commitment from everyone starting with our own blue Pacific family to our Asia Pacific family and all our partners and friends. Climate change is at the heart of our vulnerabilities as nations and peoples. The worst part for those of us most affected is the real solution is out of our hands. Hence, we urge those who can make a difference to do so immediately. Thank you.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:20:50] Thank you so much. We really appreciate you coming along to talk to everyone here today and thank you for that wonderful address. I can say that we've got over 500 people on the line with us here, and I know people have a number of questions. I will ask you to type those into the Q&A box and we'll get to them very shortly. Prime Minister, if I may have a follow up question there. You talked a lot about the impacts that the Pacific feels from climate change, and he touched on loss and damage and financing. Obviously, Pacific communities are on the frontline of climate impacts and have the most risk at risk to lose, despite, as you pointed out, contributing almost nothing to climate change. I just wondered if you could talk about how the COP can address that disparity through things like loss and damage and climate financing, but also specifically the role that the Pacific plays in advocating for that greater ambition.

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:22:01] Well, the issue of loss and damage, I think, is an issue that is still, I suppose, at a level of discussion, whether, you know, it's a matter that our global forum wants to consider or not. I mean, that's still, I think, the stage at where that situation is at. But it's very critical for us in the Pacific that the issue of loss and damage is on the table given our specific situations, you know, with small developing states. The impact of loss, you know, on our populations happens at a level of impact that is very intense. It's immediate, you know, it's not something that is incremental. And so I think a special attention needs to be given to the issue, and we are still advocating strongly for further loss and damage dialogue. You know, because I think our situations would be such that if this, if there is no consideration for that, our progress, if there's been any progress, you know, it will just put us back further and further to meet our our development goals and ensure a quality of life for our people.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:23:53] Gladys, I might direct my next question to you. You're a youth advocate for climate action, and I know you recently met with the COP26 president, Alok Sharma, alongside other Pacific people. I was just going to ask you about why youth leadership is so important when it comes to climate. It's certainly been really important for showing some leadership here in Australia.

**Gladys Habu** [00:24:19] Thank you, Ebony. Before I answer your question, I just wanted to really acknowledge the opportunity to be part of this session. I really am humbled to listen to and speak with in person our Samoan Prime Minister. Honourable Fiame being a female leader yourself in our region and fighting front on behalf of all of us is amazing and I really appreciate you advocating with that awful speech at the start of this session. Youth leadership, in my personal opinion, is very significant in climate action because youth are the future caretakers of this planet. Often the older generation and I feel that if we are not taken seriously and empowered with the ability to participate in critical decision making, as well as receiving the necessary leadership training in the climate space today, then it will only continue to widen the gap between the ongoing climate crisis and the act of implementing the strategies that we want to see and believe us on this crisis. With all our small island developing states fighting on the front line, young people are most vulnerable. That is a fact. And if we look at the demographics of the Pacific, youth in many developing countries make up the majority of the population. And for instance, in



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Solomon Islands alone, 70 percent of our population are aged 30 years old and younger. So I see that if we are to make effective climate action, we need to utilise the youth population to give impactful results. We need to engage the majority, and we can do so by ensuring that the solutions that are proposed are realistic and relatable to the target youth audience agents in order to allow them to drive genuine and holistic climate action. Like, honestly, we do not want our participation to be merely participation. We want to be an. We don't want to be tokenised now. We we don't want any more of this invitations coming in and saying, we want to invite you because it is part of our policy to to have youth involvement. We want to be invited to the climate discussion table because we want a seat there and you want to listen to us and you want to action on point. And I think that is very important going forward in this crisis. And I really, really want that. Coming out of COP26, we get increased youth representation, especially from Pacific Island nations. Yeah, going forward.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:27:20] Thank you so much. The next question again is for you, Prime Minister. I wanted to ask about we've talked a little bit about the role of the Pacific, but it seems to have had a lot more effectiveness when working as a regional bloc to achieve progress on key issues such as the Samoa pathway that SDG 14 for sustainable oceans and things like that. How important is it for the Pacific and other small island states, I guess, to act collectively? And are you expecting that working together and using that regional cooperation is really going to help push ambition at Glasgow on any particular issue, I guess.

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:28:08] This, of course, you know, in 2017, the foreign leaders endorsed the Blue Pacific narrative as the core driver of collective action for advancing the leadership vision and a framework for Pacific regionalism. It inspires us to assert our shared ocean geography and resources for the security and good of our ocean and the prosperity of our people. Working together as a small island, developing states is vital for the security and prosperity of our countries. Our collective weight as a hostess and piece it enhances our region's voice to leverage imperative actions and solutions, as well as political pressure both regionally and internationally.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:29:10] Thank you so much. We might go to questions from the audience very shortly. But Richie, I just wondered if I could come to you quickly. You gave us that at one at the very beginning about kind of the road to Glasgow and what we can expect. I just wondered, you know, we are anticipating some new announcements from the Australian government, but are we anticipating they're going to be as ambitious as the Pacific countries would like to say?

**Richie Merzian** [00:29:40] It's a good question. No, before I just I wanted to also add just what a privilege it is to have the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa for the first regional climate diplomacy forum and also Miss Abu Gladys as well having them both on board. Such strong, powerful voices really do bring home the issue to Australia. Often, you know, especially in Canberra, we feel like we're in a bit of a bubble here. The Australian government is currently considering whether to lock in a net zero by 2050 target. But that is where the conversation is, that Glasgow is about short term action. And is the prime minister outlined that that is at an inflexion point at the point of no return. If we don't increase ambition at this particular meeting, then we are in balance. A dangerous climate change in our neighbours will be on the frontline of those impacts. The bar has been set. It's at least halving emissions this decade. That would prove a credible contribution to this meeting. But then going forward, ultimately reducing emissions by three quarters by 2030 would be what would be on par with the science. And that's what many would want to see the Australian government take forward. That would be in line with the

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expectations for actually avoiding these impacts. Tonight, hopefully, hopefully, we will see more come forward from the Austrian government between now. And COP26, but even basic questions around whether the prime minister of Australia will attend is still in the works as well. So really, we don't have a plan yet. We don't have a leadership aligned for the meeting yet. There are still many questions unanswered, and that's a particularly difficult position to be in when the science, when the solutions is so clear.

**Ebony Bennett [00:31:35]** Hmm. Thank you, Richie. We might go now to some questions that we've got here from the audience, and I know that we've got a couple of journalists on the line here as well, so I'll try and get to some of your questions. The first one is from Tom Stainer from SBS World News. His question is to you, Prime Minister, he says. In your view, does Australia need to increase its 2030 emissions reduction target? If so, by how much? And should the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison attend COP26?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa [00:32:10]** Well, yes, of course. Given what my opening statement you know, we would like Australia to do that. I'm, you know, I don't have an exact number of a level of reduction that we would ask with the Australians. I think it's a bit unfair actually for the journalist to be asking me these questions. Mr Morrison will not like me for giving these answers, but you know, this is not new to him at the Pacific, position has always been very clear as to Mr Morrison's attendance. Well, you know, that's really up to the Australian government. We ourselves are finding it very difficult to, you know, to make out to, to make our way to to Glasgow and even more challenging on the way back. So we still have to make a decision about our our attendance in the COVID environment.

**Ebony Bennett [00:33:24]** Thank you so much. The next question is for you as well. Prime Minister, it's from Joe Rogerson. She asks, Would you expand on the gender responsive considerations of your climate response, which I think he touched on in your opening remarks?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa [00:33:40]** Yes, I think, you know, along the same spirit of Dennis response to the youth and involvement. You know, I think the point is everyone has to act. But then you know that for for gender responsiveness, it's well. First of all, you know that women are most affected. Secondly, that they are very responsive. They organise well around those responses. They're inclusive operators. So, you know, these are all the, you know, the grounds why this is so important that, you know, it was starting right from the policy level that there is recognition that there is that resource available, you know, to the effort of of meeting the climate change challenges. So I'm not just saying this because I'm a woman, but you know, these are well proven, you know, outcomes of how have they responded not only to climate change, but many other social issues that confront our communities?

**Ebony Bennett [00:35:01]** Gladys, I wonder if I might come to you for a response to that, as well as a young female climate leader yourself. How important is it to be inclusive as part of leadership roles, but also advocacy and activism?

**Gladys Habu [00:35:19]** Thank you, Evan. Yeah, honestly, including female leadership in spaces like this is very important. And I speak from the perspective of the general female population in rural places and Pacific island countries, where already we come from a lot of inequality and some so much disproportionate disproportionate factors that are affecting us as females. And not on top of that, we are also at the home level. I'm responsible for a lot of labour intensive work and and

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these are just the simplest things that we need to do to ensure that we have the most basic things about homes nice at home, food, water. And yet we are also affected by the consequences of climate change, making us very vulnerable and more importantly, our safety. And so coming from that perspective, I feel like females have a very wholesome understanding of how people are affected by this crisis and hence would be able to draw better solutions going forward in space.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:36:46] Thank you. The next question I have here is from Tali OWWA La Taya. I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly tali her messy. Her question is also for the prime minister, she says to fat lava Fiame Tali from the ABC ABC. I hope I'm pronouncing all this correctly. I'm sorry, Tali, will you be attending COP26 in person? Prime Minister given costs and COVID impacts? She asks. What will it mean if Pacific leaders can't physically be there to Talanoa with other leaders outside of official talks?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:37:25] Yes. I think because the hosts need to, I think, you know, have the information on who's actually attending. We will be having to make our decisions almost immediately. It's very important for the Pacific to have a presence there. But here we are. We're meeting virtually and it seems to be the way of the world at the moment. And, you know, we sincerely hope that the hosts could entertain, you know, virtual participation in the workings of the COP26 meeting.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:38:11] The next question that I've got is perhaps a follow up on that, just keeping with the impacts of COVID for a little bit. It's from Matthew Elms. He says. Thank you for your speech today. How crucial is it that Samoa and the Pacific region more broadly is able to secure vaccinations against COVID 19 as soon as possible and is enough being done to redirect resources from nations like Australia and the United States to other nations for Samoa?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:38:39] And I think it is the same for our Pacific neighbours. We've been very fortunate through various support systems to receive a full or almost full complement of vaccinations for us here in Samoa. We, we we are very fortunate to have that after the, you know, the population that needs to to to be vaccinated. And for our younger population, 17 and under New Zealand government has come forward that they will provide Pfizer vaccinations. So we're very much on track. We're at about 97 per cent for the first shot. We're probably getting close to 60 percent on the second shot and we hope that by the end of November, when the the vaccination. The shelf-life will finish by end of November, so we've got a deadline that we need to meet. We had a two day lockdown last week where we did a whole of country mass vaccination, so that has helped make the push to reach the targets that we want to reach. But we've been very fortunate the, you know, the various partners have worked successfully to provide the vaccinations to our country and as I understand it, for the Pacific in general.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:40:27] The next question is from Joe Magliano, Colo. Who's the climate adviser to the Vatican? He says to prime minister the Paris Agreement mandates emissions reduction from the consumption side, but isn't as strong on the supply side. On that note, he says the Dalai Lama, the pope and a number of Nobel laureates have called for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty to halt the proliferation of fossil fuels at the production stage. Do you think Samoa and other Pacific small island nations would support that initiative and how important, adding they on this isn't his question. I was just going to say Australia is obviously a large fossil fuel exporter. So how important are initiatives like that to be limiting or restricting coal in future?



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**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:41:18] I think it's an excellent initiative, and given the positions that we've taken over the time, it will not present us with any issues to support such an initiative.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:41:31] Gladys, I wonder if I might get you to respond to that as well. Obviously, a lot of climate action and the Paris Agreement is focussed around the demand side, but fossil fuel exports and the consumption of fossil fuels globally is still a huge issue. How important are initiatives like the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty?

**Gladys Habu** [00:41:57] Thanks, Stephanie. Yeah, I think that is a it's a very important step towards going, I mean, maintaining that 1.5 degrees Celsius that we really hope to have, although when I when I look at the way in which Australia is leading Oceania in terms of transitioning from this fossil fuel phase, I do believe that there is more that still can be done. It really saddens me that Australian politics is lagging the change that we hope to see in the region. And I do have to say, though, that there is good and I believe change is coming. And I know the general population now are seeing like the consequences of climate change in the backyard, which will be the wind of change that we hope to see. And a lot of young people are in this. And so, yeah, what I really wanted to say here is that we cannot ignore the reality because the cost of ignoring it would far outweigh the benefit of transitioning into a greener economy.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:43:14] Richie, I might just come to you quickly on that as well. I know the institute has done a bunch of work, but how important is it going to be to address Australia's fossil fuel exports?

**Richie Merzian** [00:43:25] Quite important, because if you look at the impact that Australia is having, the prime minister noted that Samoa has an insignificant impact in terms of contributing to climate change. Australia is on the other end of the spectrum. Australia is in the top 10 per cent of emitters just for its emissions onshore. Where it plays an even bigger role is in what it exports to the world. Australia is arguably the largest coal exporter, the largest liquefied natural gas exporter. When you put that together and compared with other countries, Australia the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world after Russia and Saudi Arabia. And if you look at the emissions involved in all those fossil fuels it exports, it's more than twice what it emits onshore. And so Australia's contribution is oversized in that way. Unfortunately, the Paris Agreement doesn't even mention fossil fuels, and that's by design because the supply side, those who are dealing in the problem don't necessarily want it to address that. But if we're going to solve climate change, we have too much like we do in tobacco or alcohol or drugs or weapons. You have to deal with supply as much as demand. And so the best thing that we could be doing is putting a halt to new fossil fuel projects. And that's in fact what the International Energy Agency recommends is its pathway to keep to 1.5 degrees.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:44:42] Thanks, Richie. Back to you, Prime Minister. I wanted to ask about the GCF being a valuable source of climate finance for Samoa and the region. Would you like to see that be supported by all countries? Sorry. That's the Green Climate Fund. Shouldn't speaking the acronyms that.

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:45:08] Yes, of course, and you know, we've been the recipient of such funding. And so, you know, it's one of our financing is one of the building blocks, you know, for this negotiations that we're having through the the UN. So. You know, I. I think the question is, should you other countries be participating? Well, of course, and we're not meeting, you know,

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the financial targets that have been set, you know, and and I'm sure that that is one of the burning questions. How do we meet that gap? What needs to be done to to to meet that, Guy

**Ebony Bennett** [00:46:06] Ritchie, I might ask you to respond to that as well. I know you're a veteran of many cops. How important is the Green Climate Fund?

**Richie Merzian** [00:46:14] The Green Climate Fund is the main multilateral source of financing for climate action, and I had the the good fortune of travelling to Samoa when Australia co-hosted a Green Climate Fund Board meeting in Apia, I think, in in late 2016. It was the first time that the Green Climate Fund Board, which is the 40 countries from the developing country side and half from developed countries, actually went to the Pacific and saw first hand climate impacts and agreed to scale up climate finance as well. Since then, unfortunately, Australia has pulled out of the Green Climate Fund, and it would be great to see Australia rejoin, recommit and replenish back into this fund. That has had a major role in financing climate action in the Pacific and more globally. Because climate finance is the glue, it holds together ambition, particularly in countries that aren't necessarily responsible for climate action, they have to deal with those impacts. And so it's the goodwill that developed countries provide and help mobilise that seals the deal and helps prepare countries for those unavoidable impacts. And it would be great to see Australia rejoin the Green Climate Fund, given it has played a key role in the past and is the prime minister said. Of course, all countries should be involved in the solution.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:47:33] Thanks, Richie. Prime Minister, the next question is for you. It's from Dan Jarvis body. He says. What impact, if any, would the Australian government's failure to commit to more ambitious emissions reduction targets have on its relationship with Samoa?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:47:52] Well, in any relationship, there are things that you agree on and things you don't agree on. So you know, you carry on with what you agree on and you continue to dialogue and negotiate on, you know, on issues that still need needs work. I think, you know, if with this discussion about security, for instance. So, you know, the environmental security for us is is priority. So, you know, we've had discussions on, you know, what are the definitions of security, including environmental security and so forth. And you know, there's even now moves internationally with international ports on what would be considered, you know, crimes against the environment. So, you know, all of that kind of discussion is taking place because, you know of the impact that climate change is having on all our lives. So I mean, we will continue to try to have the conversation with Australia. You know, I don't think we will get to the point where we say, OK, we're going to cut off diplomatic ties or so forth. You know, that's not how it works, you know, in any kind of relationship or community, you know, with a small community, large community, a global community, you know, you hope and this is one way for us to we always want to be at the table and continue to be talking.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:49:35] Gladys, the next question is from you. It's from Anastasia Latham. They say to loafer Fiamma and Gladys in talking about youth leadership in climate change, is there a good representation of youth at the cops and is there any changes you would like to see in COP 26 to improve youth presentation representation given its importance? Thanks, Gladys.

**Gladys Habu** [00:50:04] Thanks, Ernie. To be honest, I think over years, youth representation has improved so slowly, although I do believe that we are more Pacific small island developing states are still being represented at a lot of these global events, including cops. And so going into Cop 26,

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I'm really hoping that this is one of the priorities to increase U.S. Pacific representation in these discussions. Although I understand it, it will be very difficult considering the pandemic and travel restrictions and all that. So I learnt to watch the honourable prime minister said before. Hopefully we could maximise this by having the opportunity to join in virtually because I believe youth voice is very much needed.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:51:04] The next question is from Penny Ante Pottru, who asks, what can Australia do to lead the way to advocate and pursue the Glasgow COP26 target of 1.5 degrees? Prime Minister, I address that one to you.

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:51:23] Well, I'm not Australian, I know what I would do if I was going to Glasgow, but I think it's a bit unfair to ask me what Australia would do. But I mean, we all know Australia's situation or their position with regards to trying to change. I don't know, I mean, I think Ritchie's suggestion, you know, is perhaps they could come back to the financing table. That would be a good start. You know, take away one hand put in with the other hand, you know, that's the way. Things work, thank you.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:08] Richie, I might just get you to respond to that if you could talk to the prime minister today and give him some advice, what would your advice be?

**Richie Merzian** [00:52:16] Sure, I'll take that one, as is the token Australian, though I think and the prime minister is right, rejoining the Green Climate Fund would be the first step, and that would include a new commitment of climate finance. Australia put in 200 million into the first commitment period. Doubling that contribution and putting into the Green Climate Fund 400 million would be a good faith start. Secondly, increasing its nationally determined contribution is currently 26 percent. It should be at least 50, but really higher is better than third, hitting pause on any new fossil fuel projects. There are 20 new coal projects in New South Wales alone, let alone all the gas that that the gas fired recovery that the Australian government currently is interested in pursuing would unleash. So hitting hold on fossil fuel projects would also be another good step so that there's no shortage of steps and no shortage of opportunity for the Australian government to re-engage in the international community and show that it does take climate change as seriously as its Pacific neighbours. We've constantly said this is the number one security threat, and in fact, Australia, as part of the Pacific family, is a member of the Pacific Island Forum also shared those sentiments in saying it is the greatest threat to the Pacific and that's what it should actually follow up on doing.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:53:36] Prime minister and hopefully a straightforward question, which is when is Samoa planning to open its international borders? We've got a lot of people here on the chat today and from the Diaspora and tourists who are keen to visit. How soon can we all get to Samoa?

**Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** [00:53:53] Well, we're all keen for all of us to visit each other. I'm sorry that I cannot give you a set date. You know, we seem to be living in a world of uncertainty. We've just signed a one way quarantine free arrangement with New Zealand, starting with a class of people at the. The clothing, the workers, the RNC workers, but through those negotiations, we've also put in our students some of our medical cases, someone with New Zealand passports. So, you know, this could be a similar arrangement with Australia. I mean, already we have our seasonal workers coming over to Australia. So it's very much sort of

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prioritising that sort of economic elements. But the social ones, you know, people, returning families or uniting families or just having a holiday. I think those kind of things are going to still take a while before that happens.

**Ebony Bennett [00:55:18]** Thank you, Ben. I wonder if I might come to you for some final. Thank you.

**Ben Oquist [00:55:27]** Thank you, Ebony, and thank you, Prime Minister, before I thank Prime Minister formally, thank you, Ebony for hosting us today and all your good humour and professionalism in Christ and in hosting these events, which I think are really playing an important part in our democracy, actually. Some big debates going on with touched on some of them today and allowing the Australian public to participate in them directly, I think has been one of the there any upsides to the pandemic? There aren't many. That's one of them. Hosting the Asian, running these forums with, as I said, with such professionalism, grace and good humour has been has been one of the only upsides. So I thank you very. In March, on behalf of Australia's democracy opening and and Richie for putting us together here today, your leadership of the Australia Institute running its Climate Energy Programme, your force of nature and working on so many fronts and driving that is leading to better outcomes for Australia. And I think, in fact, the world so. Thank you very much, not just for this, but everything you're doing and the leadership is showing. Gladys, great to meet you too. Good luck getting to Glasgow if you can look forward to working with you some more in the future to thank you for everything you're doing and the climate. Need strong advocates like the prime minister, but they all need the next generation and it's great to hear from you today and your insights and look forward to working with you some more. But finally, Prime Minister, thank you so much for your leadership through the pandemic and through the recent democratic challenges to Samoa's head. It feels like to me that I was coming through that stronger, that your democratic institutions have been tested, but your leadership has seen the country through that. And now the big challenges that the world faces is not just COVID and you're having to handle all that Samoa, but the future challenges and the reality of the climate crisis is upon us and that your vision. And leadership shone through today, as it did in the U.N. the other day, and I am just not that you need it for me, but the planet so needs women like you to speak up strongly and with the authority and with courage like you're doing so all strength. And thank you for what you're doing for your country. But. Thank you for what you're trying to do for the planet. Australians need you and voices like you and action from leaders like you. Good luck with everything you're doing and thank you so much for taking the time to share that knowledge and insights and vision directly with us and through us, the Australian public. Today, we really appreciate it.

**Ebony Bennett [00:58:32]** Thank you, Ben. And just to wrap it up, that is all we have time for. So thanks very much to everyone who has tuned in today. And thanks to our guests, the Honourable Phoebe Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa. Gladys Habu, Richie McKeon and Ben Oquist. We really appreciate all of your time today and I know the audience has got a lot out of it. Thank you so much. Please join us over the next few weeks for some more exciting webinars. We've got another big climate week. Next week, we'll have our regular pole position webinar on Tuesday, but on Wednesday. Please register today if you can. We're releasing climate of the nation. It's the Australia Institute's report. It's the longest running continuous survey of attitudes towards climate change in Australia that'll be launched by the Shadow Minister, Chris Bowen. That's next Wednesday, October 13 at 11am, and check out our podcast, follow the money and subscribe

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where we normally listen to podcasts. We'd really appreciate that. Thank you so much, everyone for joining us today. We hope to see you again soon and thank you again to all of our guests.