

# Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum

His Excellency Anote Tong  
Former President of Kiribati (2003-2016)

His Excellency Tommy E. Remengesau Jr.  
Former President of Palau (2001–2009; 2013–2021)

*In conversation with*

**Ebony Bennett**  
Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

**Richie Merzian**  
Director, Climate & Energy Program, 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 Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum for 2022. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Canberra is Ngunnawal and Ngambri country and pay my respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never stated and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. As you know, days and times for our webinars do vary. So head on over to [AustraliaInstitute.org.au](https://AustraliaInstitute.org.au) so you don't miss out. Tomorrow we have a webinar with Andrew Quilty, photojournalist and nine times Walkley winner, about his new book, *August in Kabul* about the fall of Afghanistan. Just a few tips before we begin to help things run smoothly. If you hover over the bottom of your zoom screen, you should see a Q&A function where you can type in questions for our esteemed guests today. You should also be able to upvote questions and make comments on other people's questions and as well. A reminder to please keep things simple and on topic in the chat or we'll kick you out. And lastly, a reminder is being recorded. We posted on our website later today. This is the second time the Australia Institute hosts the Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum, kicking off with our very first went ahead of the Glasgow COP with the newly elected Samoan Prime Minister. This year we have two very special guests and I'll ask our executive director, Dr. Richard Denniss, to welcome them. But first, if I could acknowledge our partners, the Pacific Elders Voice and the Edmund Rice Centre, they're helping to make this event happen. We're delighted to have our guests today. I know a number of friends from the Pacific Island nations are tuning in. Thank you for joining us as well. Richard, over to you.

Richard Denniss [00:01:45] Thanks, Ebony. And it's a real privilege today to welcome our two guests. Let me start by introducing my old friend, President Anote Tong. President Tong was president of Kiribati for a constitutional maximum of three terms between 2003 and 2016. And during that time, he played an incredible role, not just within Kiribati in the Pacific, but around the world, highlighting

the existential threat of climate change to low lying island states like Kiribati. I was very fortunate to get to know President Tong in the lead up to the Paris Climate Convention in back in 2015 when the Australia Institute and he worked closely together on what was then the No New Coal Mines campaign, which culminated in President Tong riding to literally every world leader in the lead up to Paris, asking them to support his call and in turn the Pacific's call for a ban on old lines. It's a simple idea now, I assure you it was radical back in the day, back when everyone was obsessed with percentages and complicated accounting to ask for something so simple. As for the small number of coal exporting countries to stop building coal mines was radical. But while it was great when when we saw other Pacific leaders step in, it was great when Sir Nicholas Stern signed up. There was real excitement in Australia when former Wallabies captain David Pocock went on to be one of the first to endorse the coal, which of course made it front page news in Australia. So thank you for being here in Australia, still doing your advocacy, President told. It's also my great privilege to introduce former President of Palau, Tommy E. Remengesau Jr. he was also a 16 year president of Palau. It's just incredible that that we have people in Australia who have such heritage in their from their communities speaking truth to Australian power about these issues. Not only did he show strong leadership in his own country and around the world when it came to environment and climate issues, he was actually given the UN's one of the top accolades the champion of the Earth Award for his work. So thank you both for being here in Australia, telling not just our audience today, but so many of our parliamentarians what the truth of climate inaction looks like in your communities and of course, around the world. Thank you.

Ebony Bennett [00:04:38] Thank you. Thank you. Joining the Presidents today is the director of the Australia Institute's Climate and Energy Programme and joining me right next to me here in the office, former climate negotiator as well, Richie Merzian, Anote Tong, Tommy Remengesau Junior. Thank you so much for joining us today. President Tong, if I can start with you and take you back to the Paris agreement that Richard. Was talking about that he wrote to every single weld laid out back in 2015, telling them that the construction of a new coal mine undermines the spirit and intent of any agreement that we may reach, particularly in the upcoming COP21 in Paris while stopping new coal mine construction now could make the will make any agreement reached in Paris truly historical. Did we end up missing out on making Paris a historic moment? And are we any closer now to a global moratorium on new coal mines?

Anote Tong [00:05:36] First of all, let me acknowledge the realities of the land. And of course, as we embark on this interaction, we seek the blessings of the elders, our past, present and emerging. And we seek their guidance and blessing into our endeavours so that our the mission that we are on, on this occasion. And with respect to that question. Renee, it's the agreement in Paris itself, which is historical. And I think not many of us really believe that we could ever reach agreement, especially after the the Copenhagen experience. So Paris was truly historical, but at the same time, I think there were always this underlying hiccups, okay? There were countries that were not truly committed. But of course, in terms of the coal I recall being in and in Bonn and going off to Germany to see that the coal was still being mined in Germany. Now the question really, are we any closer to banning or not stopping any digging up any coal? Regrettably, no. And I think that is the sad reality of what we still face. We that the aspirations of what we came away from Paris with are no longer. I'm not we're not any closer to achieving goals. And I think we can blame many things, including the

pandemic. But it doesn't look like we'll be meeting those targets, which we set in 2015. And we're not looking like we would be able to to meet the no less than 1.5 degree rise in global temperature, which is truly unfortunate, especially for those some of the countries on the front line of climate change. And so we need to relook at that, at what we're doing with coal. We need to re-examine what it means and the implications for not just for countries like ours in the Pacific, but for humanity as a whole.

Ebony Bennett [00:07:47] The UNFCCC accounting doesn't really require countries like Australia to take responsibility for the emissions of their exported fossil fuels. But legal responsibility is quite different. Moral responsibility is it a country's, whether it's Australia or any other large exporter of fossil fuels? Is it their moral responsibility to deal with or at the very least acknowledge the ramifications of their exported fossil fuel emissions?

Anote Tong [00:08:18] Well, we must go back to the origins of that legal regime. The the international legal regime would set up that agreed that the export of coal. You're not accountable for the emissions from that. Who who designed those are those laws. Okay. I understand and I'm aware that it's the accounting form is very complicated and that for small countries like ours in the Pacific, we don't have the capacity to be able to negotiate on an equal basis with the countries that really are the ones that want to perpetrate what is what is going on. But let's just be simple, okay? It doesn't take a lot of intelligence to know that when we are talking about the global level emission, which is what is driving global temperature, what is driving sea level rise? It is not whether you are exported or Bernadette home. It's got to be. It's the total aggregate. Of what's being spilt out into the atmosphere. And I. I do not understand how you cannot lie. You can. How you can say that you are only responsible for the emissions which you burn at home when you are a huge exporter of a fossil fuel, in particular cold and subscribing to the emissions of those countries to whom you export. I think it's got to be well understood that it's about the global level of emission, both including both domestic emissions and those which you export as a country from which you derive revenue and benefits. Okay. You cannot. You are driving and you cannot you cannot reject responsibility when you are deriving benefits from that. And so, no, I think I believe that we must take a more moral if that is what do and maybe turn the moral obligation to, as you call it, into a more binding legal arrangement. I think this is what's sadly missing.

Ebony Bennett [00:10:32] Yeah, certainly there's there's not much in the way of legal ramifications or bindings at the moment. I know the Australia Institute has undertaken polling about this issue. What did it find?

Richie Merzian [00:10:47] So the Australians just picked one electorate in Australia, which was the electorate of Boothby in Adelaide, which went from being a Liberal Party state to a Labour Party state at the last election and actually asked those voters, do you think Australia, do you think countries and have a responsibility, some responsibility for the pollution from Australia's gas and coal burnt overseas and the majority did believe that there was some responsibility to be had. And we also asked them, well what should countries do about it at the next U.N. climate conference,

which will take place in Egypt in November? And the majority, the majority agreed that world leaders should agree to stop new coal mines. And so we're saying right now something that President Tong was pushing ahead of the Paris climate agreement really take more resonance now in mainstream climate conversations. And this is, I guess, a broader, broader shift that we saw in 2022. Both presidents just have been briefing numerous politicians in Canberra, including a number of the politicians, the independents who won on strong climate agendas. And there is a newfound interest in addressing a far more wider remit of Australia's responsibility on climate, not just the narrow legal responsibility, but also the responsibility that comes from profiting from selling the problem.

Ebony Bennett [00:12:16] President Remengesau you have a long history in multilateral efforts to address in particular the environment and oceans. What are you hoping world leaders will achieve at the upcoming UN climate conference in Egypt?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:12:31] First of all, thank you. I'm happy to be here and I join my colleague in also extending my respect and honour to the elders, both present and past of this homeland and. First of all, I'm hoping that the people come to the table with. Honestly. And really a stronger commitment to get things done because we've done we've been talking, we've gone way beyond what needs to be done. And there's just not enough action to back up our commitments and our doing what we need to do. When it comes to climate change, as we all know, you cannot talk about climate change without addressing the ocean and and vice versa. So for a reminder that for those islands of the Pacific, we're only 1% land and 99% ocean. So the ocean is really where the impact comes and affects the people, our our culture, our traditions, our livelihood, our economy and our sustainable future. So it has to be addressed. The ocean has to be addressed. What do we need to do about the ocean? At the very least, a 3% commitment for all nations to conserve and preserve 30% of their ocean has got to materialise as soon as possible. And there's there's a tendency I know we've just touched on it. The legal responsibility are actually loopholes that finds an excuse for people and countries to continue to do the things that they're doing and must stop. So I'm really hoping that this next climate conference begins to apply the integrity of the actions they need to take. And really, as has been said, the moral responsibility, because otherwise we're really not addressing what science is telling us. We're not addressing the everyday life of the people. You go to Palau or Guinea-Bissau or any islands of the Pacific, the ocean acidification is the reality. That's coral bleaching that are destroying our reefs. There's a tremendous frequency of stormy weather, including typhoons and earthquakes. There's the sea level rise that are affecting the livelihood and relocation of our people. So it doesn't matter where the emission of the greenhouse gas is happening, whether in the Pacific or in Australia, it's happening around the world and the impacts is affecting us small island nations of the Pacific. So at the very least, I'm hoping that the conference really begin to do the right thing to the and bridge the gap between what has been said and what needs to be done. I'm becoming quite a repetition, I should say, of stating the problem, but not enough actions on the solutions.

Ebony Bennett [00:15:57] Just sticking with oceans for a little while. President Remengesau, you've talked there about some of the impacts of ocean acidification and sea level rise. I just wondered if

you could give us a bit more detail of that. Australia obviously is a coastal nation, but I imagine we're nowhere near as reliant on our oceans as the Pacific Islands are, nor are we seeing as much as people in the Pacific Islands would be experiencing these direct impacts of the changes in climate right now. You talked about state level rise, forcing people to move, but also affecting crops and things like that. What are some of the practical impacts that your people are already experiencing?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:16:42] Well, the practical impact is that it's becoming very costly for the government to deal with this. We have to borrow money from the development banks to address these things and at the rate we're going, we're not going to be able to pay the debts, let alone address the problems that needs to be done. So, yes, it's not just the ocean that's being affected. It's the the the El Nino and the La Nina impacts on our people that really needs a partnership. It needs financing, it needs technology. It's the people to step up on their responsibilities. And I think that's the message we are also putting out that we're a family from the Pacific. And when you say family, it includes Australia as the big brother. So how do we approach this as a family? Australia has so much to contribute in its leadership role, not only on financing but on contacts and providing the the voice that is needed to be heard from beyond and across, not only across, but beyond the Pacific. So so that's the reality. And it makes us even more worried when the security discussions these days are really about defence and military geopolitical considerations, where the heart and soul of the people are not on climate change, which is the the true security of our people. So if we are going to survive, we have to put more efforts into what is being done and step up forward.

Ebony Bennett [00:18:34] This is a question for both of you. But first to you, President Tong. Climate finance will be a major point of contention at the upcoming climate conference. Should wealthy countries like Australia be scaling up its financial contributions? And more specifically, can I ask about the Green Climate Fund? I know Australia pulled out of that in the past and I think we're the only wealthy country now that's not contributing to that main climate fund. How important is climate finance?

Anote Tong [00:19:07] Okay, we have allocated the answers to the questions between us, but let me touch on it. And of course my colleague will just add on what Australia I think has been reneging on a lot of what's there, what the global members of the global community, the developed members of the global community have been contributing. And I think that was a deliberate decision by your own former administration, I guess. And so Australia is well short of what it needed to do and of course that's one of the countries Australia is by far the greatest, the biggest development partner that we have. And there is a tendency to rebrand what was existing at development assistance into climate finance. Okay, we need to be careful that we don't do this and we not we must not be confused because these are different. Okay. What is and what needs to be understood is apart from the development capital that we need to attempt to in order to and to take out development, we are also now having to deal with the ever increasing impacts of climate change. And so that will get worse and it would need additional resources on top of what already has been provided. And so whether that comes through with a green climate fund or another another vehicle, I think that the reality is, yes, we will need additional finance. And the question is, should countries like Australia

and other countries have the capacity to do it, provide it? I believe so. I think it's not really asking for more. We're just asking for to do what we are losing. In other words, compensation for damages that we are suffering not just now but into the future. I'm sure my my my colleague would like to add to that.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:21:05] Yeah. It's I think the stark and troubling point is the Australia is the only wealthy country that is not contributing to the United Nations climate, Rwanda. And so this is something we hope Australia can return to the table and be a leadership on this particular climate financing that is needed. And secondly, I think the message that we're also bringing is that. We can pursue a win win situation for Australia and for Pacific in the area of renewable energy. This is something that can really make a big difference for island governments and island communities while at the same time also good for the people of Australia, as has been indicated by Ritchie in the public opinion as to how we should be dealing with the alternatives that are available. And then we also want to bring to the table the fact that it's not just climate financing but perhaps a public private partnership in these ventures. There is so much that the leadership of Australia, the United States, Japan and all, they can also promote the investment on the islands, on renewable energy. And so the island countries won't find it necessary to go and lend money from developing banks like Asian Development Bank or the World Bank to do these things that are needed. You know, power generation is one of the most expensive costs of running government right now. That's using fossil fuel. And solar energy is free. The renewable other objectives are there. Why not have a partnership of of government and private sector in the capital necessary to come to the islands, do the infrastructure and get their money back in in a time period that we can all agree on. But again, this is the leadership that the big countries needs to take. Australia, United States and Japan. And I keep saying it's not just a matter of grants and give the islands more money, but invest in the private sector, support the private sector development because somebody is going to step in and do that outside of the family. And I think you know what I mean, you know, somebody stepping up to do what the family needs to do for themselves.

Ebony Bennett [00:23:40] Yeah. And speaking of the United States, President Biden is hosting the first U.S. Pacific Island Country Summit later this month. We have seen a high level of engagement from the new Australian Government within days of taking over and again with Prime Minister Albanese's attendance at the Pacific Islands Forum. What do you make of the new Australian Government's engagement and interest, President Tong?

Anote Tong [00:24:05] Well, it's it's very clear, I think it made very clear at the foreign meeting that Australia is here to be a part of the Pacific region. Again, it's part of the family. We've learnt, of course, the commitment on the climate. It's something that's obviously welcomed by the best forgotten countries. We are we have over the last few days witnessed the passing of the legislation on that which is very welcome. And and so Australia is now really seeing this, wanting to participate again to be a part of the family that perhaps it was taking for granted for quite some time in the past. And now it's time to renew relationships and I think we welcome that. The question will be, how will this be taken? And in the context of what's already also happening in the region, there are new partners wanting to to be a part of the Pacific Island process. And so. They would be saying that

there is now competition. And it's a concern, I'm sure, for for Australia, for some of the Pacific island countries. It's a welcome new focus of attention. We share many things in common with Australia we wish had a democratic system of government. We are modelled on our former colonial past. And so most of us have that. And so we have tended to stay together with Australia, New Zealand and the former Commonwealth countries. And so the question would be, you know, it's the renewed engagement by Australia and what is it driven being driven by and how far would that commitment go? Because there is very strong competition coming in from China and we must not beat around the issue because that is a new player in talent and they are a very, very serious new player. And of course, it will have an impact on the the focus on the what is the most critical security issue for the region, which is climate change, not the competition between two superpowers. And one of the best is we want to deliver while here is okay, we know this is going on, but let us let it not distract us from the main issue, which is climate, the climate challenge. And so in this context, Australia, is it gone far enough? And I think we go back to the emission levels and I think I repeat the same message again. What is Australia committing to via the legislation is still short of what what the science says needs to be done in order that we will survive beyond 2060 because we have been given, according to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC beyond 2016. Countries like ours may not be habitable. And the question is, is Australia doing enough? To avoid that. And I think we know that unless there is more stepping up for deeper cutting deeper cuts in emission, including exported emissions, I don't think we're going to survive that.

Ebony Bennett [00:27:22] Yeah, it's a grim reminder of exactly what is at stake. Australia has put up its hand to host a United Nations climate conference, which it would like to do in partnership with Pacific Island Nations. I guess I'll ask you both. What would Pacific Nations look for in a partner like Australia and how important do you think this would be to, I guess put some more pressure on Australia to really lift its game? Obviously we've got a new government that's more interested in climate, but as you've both outlined, we're not adequately meeting what the science demands. So yeah, what would Pacific nations look for in a partner like Australia to co-host a cup?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:28:07] I'm looking forward to Australia and the Pacific hosting the Cup and not be embarrassed of ourselves. We have to do our responsibility as hosts and we would like to be a positive example to the rest of the world that we're hosting because we have done some meaningful changes, we have done some meaningful work that makes us want to share those results with the rest of the world and to seek the partnership of the rest of the world to what we're doing, because things can as they continue like now. I wouldn't want to host something and invite somebody to my home because they're going to say, Get your house in order first before you, you know, you are trying to tell us what what to do. So I think very, very frankly, Australia needs to stop the new exploitations and explorations for a guess and goal. They need to focus on renewable energy, renewables, because that's that's really part of the solution, not just for Australia but for the Pacific. And then the third thing, of course, is to take the leadership and on what the global obligations are, the Green Climate Fund and the technology shifting of a tick of priorities to the areas that needs to make a difference now. I think with that, I guess we can all support let me just add that to our friend, the United States, and be very frank about it. The United States leadership was not there in the last four years. And we were all hoping after Paris that we will share the the strong commitment and the strong leadership by the United States, Australia and all our close friends and

partners. But it didn't happen. So this is again, we're at a crossroad where it's not just the United States, but Australia, Japan, Europe. They need to take the the the ethical, the moral leadership that must be there in order for others to say, yeah, we have a chance.

Ebony Bennett [00:30:37] Would you like to add something to that president?

Anote Tong [00:30:39] I would just simply to add that we I guess we we have addressed this in a different discussion. But if Australia is going to be it is going to credibly believe that it's it's going to wants to host and in partnership with the Pacific Island countries whose very livelihood is at stake then. But if at the same time it continues its coal and gas exports, it would be a very, very clear contradiction. And I think we're not okay, we're not silly enough not to see that. Okay. We understand that because it's not about hosting the cup, it's about cutting emissions. And this is what the cup must be all about, cutting emissions so that the disaster that is coming can be avoided. It's unfortunate that I've watched this over the different changes of administrations in different countries, that climate change has been one of the political footballs around. And that is totally it's very unfortunate. I think Australia, as a as a people have, coming to understand that that can no longer happen, continue to happen. And I'm so happy to see that happening. But at the political level, we need to stop playing that game because lives are at stake.

Ebony Bennett [00:32:01] Indeed. Thank you so much for that. We're going to go to questions from the audience very shortly. But it's such a powerful point that you've made there and one hopefully that is shifting, as you said. We saw a very big political shift at the last election. Australia saw a number of people elected to parliament on the basis of taking stronger climate action. So there is definitely hope that that mood has shifted and that's now what we've called a climate super majority in the Parliament. So hopefully the ambition of some of those newly elected people can lift the ambitions of the whole Parliament. And the first question that I have is from a Government who says Maori control and remain Catholic. If a cut in emissions, if cuts to emissions are inadequate to save our islands, how can we hold global emitters accountable for loss and damage? If I could ask first President remain yourself to answer that one.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:33:06] Well, this is definitely tied in with the moral responsibility of nations to to be able to deliver on what the commitments are. Obviously, we're nowhere close to the targets that have been committed. And so work on the ground, work on the on the level of the community really has to step up. And that can also involve multilateral or bilateral partnerships. And as I said, the private sector has a lot of role and responsibility to be a part of the equation. There's a tendency to see that, to say that it's a global problem and therefore a global fund, it is needed. But sometimes the sheer bureaucracy, the sheer challenge of addressing and accessing those assistance are just not fast enough, nor accurate enough to to really focus on the the problems of the land. So I think we have to look at it from all perspective and from all angles. But at the end of the day, it's what is effective, what is efficient to get the people out of their misery. Because we're not talking about prevention. We're actually talking about adaptation and mitigation and loss or damage. Those are the three things that are already people are drowning and need help in.



Ebony Bennett [00:34:48] President Tong, would you like to add anything to that?

Anote Tong [00:34:50] We are most certainly. I would like to make a few comments. Yeah, we of course, there is no existing legal regime to hold these people to account. And that is very unfortunate because the international legal system does not address that. But imagine being in Australia, if you were doing something like that in Australia, you know, you would be a piece of legislation to hold you to account. But of course this continues to be elusive at the international level. So and it continues to be very invasive because of the pressures coming from the different interest groups. So that's a region that the Pacific are supporting, an initiative by the government of Vanuatu to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice. It does say it will not penalise. It is not a way to find a way to penalise those countries who continue to emit. But at least it would give at least some opinion, legal opinion as to whether it's a victim or not. Okay. And now we are very happy to hear that the Australian Government is supporting that initiative. But there is something that is needed because the countries don't have the moral, sufficient moral capacity to do the right thing on their own, especially if they really are not the ones in control but are being controlled by other interests. And that is a sad reality that we are beginning to hear and beginning to understand that some may be sometimes in that, and I think this is worldwide. I remember listening to the American economist, Jeffrey Sachs when he came in 2018 and he said he talked about regulatory capture. And what it is, is when the governments which are supposed to regulate are being captured by the entities they're supposed to regulate. And that is very sad. And so for countries like ours, if we cannot cut emissions, we would have to find somewhere else to go. Okay. And so this come that raises a different challenge entirely. And so the issue of climate induced migration is up and coming. It's inevitable, but yet it's not sufficient discussion around that at the international level.

Ebony Bennett [00:37:13] Mm hmm. I wonder, both, if either of you have a comment on the awful floods we're seeing in Pakistan at the moment. That's such an immediate impact and so many people displaced, let alone, you know, at the loss and damage, as we've just talking about.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:37:29] I mean, it's a sad reality. And the frustration and anger comes not because it's a surprise, but because we know this is going to happen. We knew it was going and it's happening. So science is important. And I think sometimes it's the economic considerations that override the scientific matters. And so it's about grief and it's also about doing the right thing. But unfortunately, people often times showcase the need for economy over, you know, disasters such as what we were witnessing in Pakistan.

Ebony Bennett [00:38:12] You know. The next question I've got is from Holly KERNAN. She says in the last year, Palau joined over 120 countries in signing the global methane pledge, while Australia has not. What would your message be? President Remengesau for the Australian Government in reducing potent methane emissions and the importance of that.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:38:37] Well, it would be a very good leadership example and a role for the Big Brother Australia to show, show the world on behalf of the Pacific family that it's doing the right thing.

Ebony Bennett [00:38:54] Excellent. The next question I've got is from Richard Bentley. He says Australian banks defend their loans to gas and coal companies by claiming they are advising them on pathways to carbon neutrality. Could we establish an equivalent process by which we ensure customers purchasing products have plans to transition to a carbon free future, or even taxing the exporters to provide assistance to customers in the transition? What are some of the ways that we can tackle some of those elements of civil society that participate in the fossil fuel industry in other ways like finance? President Tell me if I could ask that one.

Anote Tong [00:39:39] Well, it's finance, as always, being the driving power behind all of this. If there was worldwide agreement that no further investments should be directed towards the opening of new coal mines, the digging up of a new fossil fuel, then obviously that would go a long way towards pushing the the fossil fuel industry not to be able to expand. And so, again, maybe it's a factor of the capitalist system which which we seem to have embraced. Okay. It is unfortunate, but capitalism, of course, the greatest risk. Greed is great no matter what. And I think that's been the problem, this insatiable, insatiable drive for more wealth and which is so regrettable that it's so it's so owned by so few. Okay. But at the cost to so many. It is very, very unfortunate. And I I've always wondered how we could reverse this, because even our own governments are not able to withstand the pressure that is coming. And so there was some discussion earlier about the the chlorofluorocarbons that were successful. And the reason, I believe, is because, one, there was a substitute identified, but more importantly, they didn't have the power. Now that we are facing with the fossil fuel industry to resist that. And so here we are. How can we do it? It's maybe the governments are not doing what they should be doing and how well it is. I continue to rig my mind how we might get the fossil fuel industry to become more moral. I think we had experience at the global level with the tobacco industry. We are trying to deal with the fossil fuel industry. It's far more powerful.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:41:35] Let me just add on to the really important consideration of public education, public perception and and the strong need for civil societies and and NGOs to really do the the research and the data and the accountability of many of these government actions and announcements and what needs to be done. I think at the end of the day, it's all about really a transparency of how fast or how effective or how where we need to go. And many times, especially with small island governments. These kind of information are not necessarily ready or available. And so we need to, again, work together, whether it's the Government Accounting Office or the civil societies or private sector, to put up the accurate picture and the accurate accountability that our people deserve.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:35] And Richie, I might ask you to come in here. Australia obviously has huge gas and coal exports. Our banking system is still very involved in there. And what does Australia really have to do to come to grips with this in the short term?

Richie Merzian [00:42:53] Yeah, it's it's a big concern in the sense that you have over 100 new fossil fuel projects in Australia at over 70 coal and over 40 gas. And so the pipeline is there. Now, not all those projects will be up and running, but even just taking a handful of those projects and looking at the emissions just in Australia from digging up all that new coal and gas, you're looking at blowing out any budget to maintaining 43%. But the bigger problem is they're still getting financed both from the private sector and from the public sector. Now the Paris Agreement has three goals which you know, and the President had clearly aware of having helped negotiate them. One is to reduce emissions. The second is to adapt to the unavoidable impacts. And then the third is to align finance with the goals of the Paris Agreement. And that hasn't really happened. And that's not just obviously private companies that put profits first, but even public entities in Australia. And we asked direct the there was a question put towards one of the financing agencies, the public financing agencies, Export Finance Australia, and they said that the Paris Agreement didn't really deal with their project financing and they have since funded numerous fossil fuel projects. This is a public agency. And so this is the problem. The 43% bill that was recently passed did go to some extent in forcing some of these agencies, these public agencies, to at least consider climate change when they make their financing goals. That's a very useful start. It won't be the end of it. They probably will still factor in how they do business. But it's a start and it's regulating our financial institutions, public and private, to consider climate change as part of their criteria for financing. That, I think is essential, and that's something that governments across the world should be looking at doing, both in terms of their financing, but then also the private sector.

Ebony Bennett [00:44:54] Yeah, the next question that I've got is from David Trent. He says, alongside recommitting to multilateral climate financing mechanisms like the GCF. What role can Australia play in supporting global south led financing mechanisms such as the Pacific Resilience Facility? He would like to answer that one.

Anote Tong [00:45:20] Okay. Yeah. I think I understand that the present government is looking at that, looking at it, reviewing its position with regard to funding, providing climate finance. Of course, they need to go back and decide which one because there is the Green Climate Fund. Do they want to go back into that or do they want to do scale their contribution towards climate financing in the Pacific alone? Of course, there is no reason why they cannot do both. But but the reality is this the Pacific island countries need a facility that they can access. We have a limited capacity to put together the documentation or all of the paperwork that a number of these organisations need that financial institutions. And it takes us a long time to to be able to negotiate finance out of the Green Climate Fund, given what was the global environmental facility and if it was a facility which could be more accessible and it's got a shorter bureaucracy than all of these very complicated international financial institutions. It would help tremendously. We need to be able to reach the grassroots so that people are not waiting for a long time just to build something to protect their communities. A sea wall or with. And quite often it may come too late. But yes, Australia has that. I think if it really wants

to step up those of the way it might be able to make a contribution and that's where it's going to be meaningful to the local community.

Ebony Bennett [00:47:03] President Remain So I might ask this next question of you. It's from Grace Munnings and she asks, How can we support developing economies towards improving their renewable energy capabilities and to transition away from reliance on fossil fuels?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:47:20] Yes. A very realistic and needed question. And I believe I alluded to that earlier. First of all, the policies of the land have got to focus on renewables. That's the mandate that we need all governments to see. So most island governments have a target by 2025 that reach 25%, 40. But at the end of the day, it's not just the support from Green Climate Fund that necessarily gets the job done. We are really encouraging and promoting public private partnerships. This is an area where many of the corporations in Australia and throughout the world can begin to come to the communities, island communities and apply the technologies that are relevant, very efficient and less costly to do to the island governments. That would be a that would go a long way to providing the needed capital. Again, we are depending so much on Asian development banks and world banks and governments are incurring debts left and right to do the infrastructure that has been destroyed by the impacts of climate change. And renewable energy is really the way forward for a less costly government, a less costly livelihood, and really a sustainable future for all for the island communities. Because we're talking about our culture, we're talking about traditions. We're talking about our way of life. We're talking about the ocean that we depend so much. And who is in the ocean is the most impacted by climate change forces. So it's our economy. So if I can just get the understanding across that you don't have to just give us money to do these, you know, encourage one or two energy company to come to the islands. They will make a very good example of of what can be done effectively with the most impacted, possibly, positively impacted.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:32] The next question I've got is from Dylan Cornell, who asks about your well, I've got two different questions. Both are essentially about Australia's nearly 43% emissions reduction target. And I guess the limitations of that, that exceeding that target to something like what the science demands is often derided in Australia as being more of a political target aligned with a particular political party or other, rather than being science driven. What does that 43% emissions reduction target mean for the Pacific?

Anote Tong [00:50:09] Well, let's that's in as I said, I can tell you and I've said throughout our visit, it doesn't go far enough to ensuring that guaranteeing that our our our grandchildren, my grandchildren will be able to be guaranteed a future. And the question really is that the reduction of 43%, how is it being counted? Okay. We must ask that question as well. What does it include counting? What credits are being cross credit to go back? Okay. Because otherwise it becomes just a posturing move. It's we understand that politics is important, but if politics is no longer relevant to the realities of what it is that we are facing, maybe Australia can continue to function. But as I said earlier, countries like ours in the Pacific would have been underwater by then. Many of them will not be habitable. And so the question is, are we still in, in, in, in line to meet the 1.5 degree rise in global

temperature? I believe not. And so Australia needs to really go much further than that and I think it's got to be a bit more transparent. And the times, the science is very clear. And so I'm sure your government understand that. But of course, your people may not be fully conversant with how the numbers are being used to transmit a message. But from our perspective, it does not guarantee the safety of our future generations.

Ebony Bennett [00:51:55] President Remengesau Would you like to add anything to that when it comes to targets?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:52:01] It's a good start. 43% is a good start, but it should not stop at 43%. And frankly, we were encouraged by members of the parliament who said this is only a start. But I guess it remains to be seen as to when the subsequent legislation really addresses this problem. And we're looking at many of the research reports for us. And it's interesting, amazing actually that that support and subsidies to gas and gold alone are in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion. So that's a mind boggling figures. And I think from some of the discussions with the members of the Parliament, it's definitely money that could also be shifted to addressing renewable energy and really begin to address the the win win situation that we are all asking for.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:03] If I might ask a bit of a cheeky question before we finish up. We've recently seen the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the second and the beginning of the reign of King Charles, the third. Both of you served multiple terms and had extensive careers in politics. Any reflection on such a long reign for the monarch or on King Charles and his well known advocacy for climate change action?

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:53:33] Well, first of all, we definitely send our condolences and respect to the queen. She has been a worldwide figure of dignity and stability and leadership. And I think that's the kind of character that we all want from our leader.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:57] The mail in.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [00:54:00] At a Gingrich a Charles is really a friend of of the small island nations because many of the things that we've heard him address climate change and other ocean or climate change forums have really been in inclusive, I should say. For instance, he talked about pollution in the ocean with plastic and how the Microplastic DNA is actually the the one of the hazards or one of the the dangers for for the world and for those of us who eat fish in our diet. It very it is very concerning that our fish are eating the plastics and therefore, it is not going to be conducive to our good held in the long run. So he is somebody that we are very much in support of, with his strong position in support for climate change, and especially not just for developed nations, but the people most affected by climate change.

Ebony Bennett [00:55:16] President Tong, would you like to add anything?

Anote Tong [00:55:18] More Certainly. Yeah, more said. We, of course, extend our condolences to the people of the United Kingdom, the family of the late Queen. Of course, you Australians also asked the history of your head, a former head of state. And then, of course, she's been such an epitome of grace. I've had the pleasure of meeting Your Majesty on more than one occasion, and it's always amazing how she can make. She seems to be a bright light in the middle of wherever she sees you. She is. That's always been the impression that I've made of Her Majesty. The transfer of the monarchy to King Charles's. That is a welcome one. I suppose it was always expected that it would happen one day. And the question is, are we ready for it? And the question is, is he ready for it? And I know there's been talk around different regions of the Commonwealth about moving away from having the King of England as monarch, as head of state in the different countries here in Australia. I know you've been looking examining that this is not the right time to be talking about it. I understand that. But these are the realities that we will face in the days ahead. And, of course, the king. King Charles, the seventies before he became the monarch, had always been a very strong advocate for for the environment and climate change. I had the opportunity to interact with him on this, and he's always been very strong on the issues. And listening to his opening statement. When you become king king, he indicated that he will be stepping down from some of these commitments. And I don't think climate change advocacy should be one of the reasons that he stepped down, because it's a lifeblood for people, not just in that part of the world, but here in Australia. You need all of the advocacy that you need, especially now that he's become the head of state, not just of the United Kingdom, but those countries that continue to have the monarch and and the United Kingdom as head of state. I would like to challenge him to say, you know, stay on board, but we need you on board so that we can deal with this vexing issue of climate change.

Ebony Bennett [00:57:51] And of course, that shouldn't really be political, should it?

Anote Tong [00:57:54] No, not at all.

Ebony Bennett [00:57:55] I might just ask you to have a few reflections. It was the Glasgow call that I think really made a lot of headway when it comes to tackling, I guess the methane pledge that we've already talked about, as well as coal and the supply of coal kind of a bit more head on. I think I've got I don't know if people can see here some photos of you from the last couple, COP15 back in Paris, where you were launching that global moratorium on coal mines with our executive director, Richard Dennis there, and Kumi Naidoo from Greenpeace. I just wondered if just to bring us home some reflections on how far we've come from Paris to Glasgow, and are we making some headway, at least?

Anote Tong [00:58:46] Well, there are definitely we have made progress, I think. But the message that joined the campaign, that's definitely the case and especially the young people. This is very, very encouraging. The young people really need to come all of. Come on board on this one. But we continue to be some distance away from where we need to be. And for the simple reason that we're still not having the right the right not pressing the right buttons. Okay. Because as I said earlier, we need to be able to communicate and somehow make an impact on the on the multinational corporations who are actually responsible for this. And why the power behind manipulating this away from these targets that we we need to be. And so that is where we are at the moment. We we're still nowhere near reassuring ourselves. That set me for us that we would have our my brother more than 20 grandchildren. Okay. And I cannot tell them when I get back that. Yes. Now we can be assured that you will still have peaceful. So far, the indications are that they will have to find a new home as they grow.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [01:00:01] Hmm. And just very quickly, I wish we would be in a better situation or status quo than we need to be, because it's certainly not enough. But having said that, I think my frustrations and my hopelessness are kind of balanced with my faith for the young people. I truly have hope that if there's somebody who's going to rightfully address the situation is really the next generation because it's their future. It's their children and grandchildren's future. And they will eventually make the decisions on the morals and integrity and responsible manner. So far, everything is all about the debate between the economy and climate change. And I think that's the reason why we're slow.

Ebony Bennett [01:00:52] Yeah. Look, thank you both so much for your time. His Excellency Anote Tong, former president of Kiribati. His Excellency Tommy Remengesau, Junior, former president of Palau, Richard Denniss executive director at the Australia Institute and Michael Richie Merzian head about climate and energy programme. Thank you everyone for your great questions. Thank you. Also to the Pacific Elders Voice and the Edmund Rice Centre for their support for this event. And don't forget to join us tomorrow for entry Crotty on his new book, August in Kabul. And stay tuned will post the video of this to Australia Institute TV later today and onto all our social media accounts as well. And we're finally going to turn the audio from today into a podcast. You can listen to such a great conversation. Thank you so much, everyone. Thanks again for your time. He's excellencies and we'll see you again soon.

Tommy E. Remengesau Jr [01:01:44] Thank you. Thank you. Bye.