

# Climate Change and the Pacific: Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum 2023

## Australia Institute webinar transcript

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E&OE

**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:03] G'day, everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome to our webinar series today. Thank you so much for joining us. I want to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which Polly and I live and work.

It's the Ngunnawal and Ngambri country here and we pay our respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land and I highly encourage you, if you haven't read yet, the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Head on over to their website and check out the full statement ahead of the referendum on the Voice to Parliament that we're going to have later this year. Make sure that you're informed yourself not listening to whatever we hear on the Internet. Make sure that you're nice and informed on that so that we can have a really amazing vote and campaign later this year.

This is a special event that we're holding with the Pacific, but the Australia Institute does have webinars at different times of the week and different days of the week. So please head on over to [AustraliaInstitute.org.au](https://AustraliaInstitute.org.au) to find our upcoming webinars. Later today we will have a webinar event that we're doing with Kerry O'Brien and Thomas Mayo and their book on the Voice to Parliament. So check that out later today.

Just a few tips before we begin the webinar today to make sure that things run smoothly. You can ask questions and so you can type those questions out in the Q&A box and will moderate those questions a little bit later. You should also be able to upvote other people's questions if you think they've got a really good question to ask and a reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or we will boot you out.

Finally, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and it will go up on the Australia Institute's website and our YouTube channel later today so you can check it out there if you have to duck out for any reason. And we'll also try and put it up as a podcast as well. So I'm very excited about today's webinar. Before the 22 federal election, Labor, the new government made the commitment that it would restore Australia's place as the first partner of choice for our Pacific family.

And within days of winning the election, the newly appointed Foreign Affairs Minister, Penny Wong, flew to Fiji to address the Pacific Island Forum and to reiterate the Government's approach to the Pacific. And in that address she talked about the fact that under past governments, Australia had perhaps neglected its responsibilities to act on climate and showed disrespect to Pacific nations and assured Pacific leaders that Australia will listen, we will listen, we will hear you and we have heard you. So it's now a year since Labour won that election, and in the last 12 months Minister Wong has visited every single country in the Pacific Islands Forum.

The recent budget committed almost \$2 billion to strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific. And in a recent Senate Estimates committee, government officials indicated that Pacific countries are still very supportive of hosting a UN climate conference in partnership with Australia.

At face value all of these things seem like really positive steps, but has Australia really heard the Pacific? Are we really listening? That's the question that we want to ask today. It seems like there's one thing that Pacific leaders have been asking Australia to do over the last decade, and that's to stop producing and exporting fossil fuels that we know are causing dangerous climate change. Yet we're still the world's third largest fossil fuel exporter and we've got 28 coal mines in the pipeline for approval. So where does that leave Australia? Well, that's what we're going to get into today, and I'm delighted that we're going to be joined by two eminent leaders from the first two countries to join the call or to launch the call, sorry, at the United Nations climate talks for an international Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which would phase out the use of coal, oil and gas. So today we are going to hear from the Honourable Ralph Regenvanu . He's running a little bit late today the Minister of Climate Change, Adaptation, Meteorology and Hazards, Energy, Environment and Disaster Risk-Management for the Republic of Vanuatu. And we're also going to hear from the Honourable Seve Paeniu, Minister of Finance of Tuvalu. And also joining us is Mr. 'Alopi Latukefu . He's the director of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education. And lastly, we get joined by our climate and energy program director Polly Hemming. But 'Alopi, if I can hand over to you, please, for an official introduction. We're doing this in partnership, of course, with the Edmund Rice Centre, and I'm delighted to introduce 'Alopi, thank you so much.

**'Alopi Latukefu** [00:05:13] Thank you both. And can I also say hi to everyone online? It's great to be here and great to be part of this wonderful opportunity to discuss really important issues facing the Pacific and facing the challenges. Can I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the country. I'm coming to you from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung of a cooling nation otherwise known as Melbourne and the Elders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded, as was mentioned in Australia, and in this year particularly, we have the opportunity for a new beginning with our First Nations brothers and sisters through the referendum later this year. The Edmund Rice Centre is committed to the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including Voice Treaty and Truth. Thank you to the Australia Institute for co-hosting this webinar with us and a warm welcome to all of you joining us today, particularly our guests, the Honourable Ralph Regenvanu and the Honourable Seve Paeniu . You as well as those of you joining us from the Pacific. My name is 'Alopi Latukefu, who is mentioned and I am the director of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Australian based Human Rights Centre, founded in 1996 and dedicated to the promotion of justice, human rights and the rights of the earth. Our headquarters are located in Sydney and we work locally, nationally and internationally, including across the Pacific. Our focus is on three key program areas First Nations peoples and reconciliation, refugees and people seeking asylum and Pacific Islander communities and climate justice. In each of these areas, we partner with grassroots communities and individuals in order to identify and raise awareness of the causes of injustice, enhance and promote the voices of those who are systematically excluded and promote action that engages people in the work of social change. Given many of you today have a strong interest in the Pacific, I take this opportunity to invite you to have a look at our work on our website and sign up for our updates, which I understand we put up on the chat in this on the site. Thank you. I work in the Pacific, started in 2006 when we responded to calls to solidarity from Kiribati as a result of the negative impacts climate change was having on the people of Kiribati other Pacific nations. Small island nations have contributed very little to the climate crisis but are at the frontline of climate impacts, something I'm sure that the Honourable Seve and the Honourable Ralph will be talking to today via our Pacific Calling Partnership Initiative. We collaborate with our Pacific Island neighbours to communicate and amplify the climate change messages within Australia and internationally. More specifically, we build community capacity on climate advocacy and actively seek out and help

create opportunities for Pacific Islanders to tell their stories, promote understanding of climate impacts on their homelands, and pursue climate justice. As an example of our work, is last year's Climate focussed Australian tour of the Pacific Elders voice, members, the Honourable His Excellency Aote Tong, former President of Kiribati and Mr. Tommy Remengesau, former President of Palau. We organised this tour in partnership with the Australian Institute and other NGOs. The tour gave rise to a series of political meetings, diplomatic meetings and public events as well as lectures. It also generated significant media coverage in Australia and across the region. If you'd like to know more about this work or would like to sign up for updates, as I mentioned, please head to the links in the chat now. We also have a current appeal which we encourage you to consider donating to if you are in a position to do so. Thanks again to the Australia Institute for their collaboration and partnership and I'll now pass back to Ebony for the rest of the programme. This is a wonderful opportunity, as I mentioned, to hear from two of the great leaders in the region who have been at the forefront of taking their work and their efforts to help in Pacific climate change globally as well as throughout Australia and the region. Thank you.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:09:31] Thank you so much 'Alopi and thank you for all of your help with organising this webinar. We really appreciate all the work that the Edmund Rice Centre does. I'm very pleased now to introduce the Honourable Seve Paeniu, Minister of Finance of Tuvalu. He's also the Minister responsible for climate change and as such has been appointed to the Pacific political climate champion for loss and damage for the last two years. As Minister of Finance, he represents Tuvalu on both the Boards of Governors of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Thank you so much for joining us, the Honourable Seve Paeniu.

**Hon. Seve Paeniu** [00:10:13] Yes. Thank you for the opportunity. The ministerial dialogue in Port Vila in February this year agreed for a call for a fossil fuel free Pacific. So this is quite an ambitious initiative which has been endorsed by the Pacific Ministers of Transport and Energy in their meeting in Port Vila at the beginning of May last month. We all know that the climate crisis and the climate emergency we are in is caused by fossil fuel. For Tuvalu, a small island, a low lying nation. We are actually living the effect of sea level rise and climate change. Our land is constantly being eaten away. There are islands that are disappearing or being submerged. Our food and water security is being threatened. And the livelihoods of our people are therefore being threatened. And this is all caused by climate change. And we know that fossil fuel is the cause of climate change. So the Pacific now is considering and it will be table at the Pacific Island's forum leaders meeting later this year to formalise the call for a fossil fuel free Pacific. But in Port Vila, the Port Vila call for a fossil fuel free Pacific. We also agree to take an ambitious action. To call on the international community to support us to launch a call for a fossil fuel non-proliferation Treaty. But before I speak more about that detail, Tuvalu is has now become a core member of the. The BOGA initiative Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance, which is spearheaded by Denmark and Costa Rica. It is an alliance that calls for the halting of further issuance of licensing of oil and gas production. So the BOGA initiative is an initiative that goes a long way towards getting countries to recognise the impact of fossil fuel. And what we are now calling is a movement. And advocacy for countries to agree to establish a non-proliferation treaty on fossil fuel production. So the idea is to stop any further expansion of fossil fuel. But in the long term to actually eliminate existing fossil fuel consumption. It is an ambitious initiative and targets. But for us. The small island developing states. Who in total contribute less than .03% to total emissions. Are at the forefront and that the brunt of the impact of climate change and sea level rise. And therefore it is a matter of our security and our survival. And that's why we are very eager and committed to ensuring we address the causes of climate change, which we know very well is caused by fossil fuel production and consumption. So thank you for the opportunity.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:15:28] Thank you very much. I believe we do have the other minister, the Honourable Ralph Regenvanu, on the line with us now. Thank you so much for joining us. I would like to announce that he is the Minister of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Hazards, Energy, Environment and Disaster Risk Management for the Republic of Vanuatu. Minister Regenvanu has been a driving force behind the Port Vila call for a fossil fuel free Pacific and the establishment of a global commission on fossil fuels. I'll hand over to you. Minister Regenvanu. Thank you.

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:16:10] Well, thank you. Good day to all. And greetings from the Republic of Vanuatu. A greetings to Minister Bindura. Good to see you again. My colleague in pushing this treaty and the popular call. And thank you very much to the Australia Institute and the Edmund Rice Centre for hosting this important webinar. Yes, here in Vanuatu we are currently still in a state of emergency, a national state of emergency that's been issued because of the effects of two category four cyclones that followed each other within a few days. That hasn't happened before as unprecedented event up to Category four cyclones within the space of a few days hit the country. And as a result of that, we we made an assessment and we made a declaration of a national state of emergency to allow us to respond to this disaster. And we are now three months in as of as of June. We are now completing the relief. And moving into the early recovery ready, the early recovery phase running into recovery. But that disaster alone set us back. The estimate is over 40% of our GDP in terms of the economic loss from this event, this twin cyclone event back in 2015 when Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu, it was the first ever Category five cyclone to hit the region and it had to. And we know that the economic loss from that was equivalent to 64% of our GDP. So if you can imagine a single climate event costing us the equivalent of 64% of our GDP, it reflects not only the scale of the the climate disaster, but also the disproportionate impact it has on very small economies like ours. We are the smallest economies in the world in Vanuatu. Back in 2015, we were at least developed country, according to the United Nations. So the countries that are the most underdeveloped of all of the world and we graduated from that according to the United Nations at the end of 2020. But the categorisation, the criteria that the United Nations uses for graduating countries does not take into account vulnerability. And this is an issue I know that to anyone about the fighting. Now, the fact that the criteria used is not take into account the fact that we were hit by these two cyclones this year that cost us over 40% of our GDP. So it's like you take two steps forward, one step back, or sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back in terms of economic development, in terms of the state being able to deliver for its citizens, which is the fundamental duty of the state and of us as elected officials who become members of parliament and ministers of state. So it is really this great uphill battle to try and see. Other countries who did agree. Like Australia, Like all the countries of the world back in Paris. To set the world on a target of an emissions target of less than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels in terms of temperature rise and in terms of a green climate fund of over \$100 billion that would be available to help the most vulnerable countries. So those two targets that we agreed on in Paris that the whole world agreed to have not been met. They're not being met. We're not we're not seeing the emissions reduction that we need to see happen. We're not seeing the financial commitment from the developed countries to help the developing countries to build their resilience and adapt and mitigate and deal with loss and damage. And that was the context in which Vanuatu pushed for this International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the impacts of climate change, on the environment, on states, on people and human rights. Because if you look at all the international conventions we've signed going right back to the charter on the expulsion of the United Nations, the human rights conventions, the political and social covenants on human rights. The UNF triple C, of course, the Law of the Sea

Convention on the Rights of the Child. All of these have obligations for states to safeguard their people and their future. And we wanted to seek an opinion from the International Court of Justice that by continuing to contribute to emissions, which we know, according to the science and the IPCC reports, make it crystal clear that it's these emissions principally. Like over nearly 90% coming from coal, oil and gas. We know that that's scientifically indisputable. Countries utilising coal, oil and gas contribute to emissions, not meeting their targets, contributing to these disasters we experience which cause us to lose so much of our potential development for our people and have to put it back into relief and recovery efforts like we're doing now. We wanted the court to say, is this are states allowed to do this? They've signed up to all these agreements, they've signed up to these international law agreements, and now we see countries like Australia, for example, talking about the rule of law internationally. Okay, You've signed up to all of these agreements. You've signed up to the Paris Agreement. That's the international rule of law. If you don't meet that commitment, do you have a right to talk about meeting the themes, national rule of law? You know, in other areas, for example, Ukraine, for example, issues to do with safety of navigation, which are all matters of international law. If you are not meeting these fundamental principles that protect life and property and safety of people. What are we talking about? And so we were very happy that there was a unanimous resolution by the United Nations on the 20th of 29th of March this year to refer that question to International Court of Justice. We shall begin to hear and receive submissions at the end of this year, and we should get a decision on that by the end of next year. And we're hoping that that decision will help us to lobby with states to say, look, this these commitments, these are not just commitments in your nationally determined contributions that you can say, well, we're going to do this. These are actually binding international law commitments. And you are committed to do it to to undertake them. And so coming back to the region, I know this, this webinar is on. Is Australia listening? I was in Nauru in 2018 as the Minister of Foreign Affairs where the Pacific Islands Forum, the countries of the Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand and all the countries in the Pacific, agreed to the declaration. Which said that climate change is the single greatest threat to the security of the people of the Pacific islands, the Gulf nation states. So the single greatest security threat is climate change. And Australia signed up to that. My colleague, the former Foreign minister Marise Payne, was there on behalf of Australia. She signed up to the rest of us. We've seen in subsequent years, for example, in 2020 and sorry, 2019, in Tuvalu, a Pacific Island Forum leaders communique. I was there again. Scott Morrison was there. We. Marise Payne was I think she was there. Yes. That statement came out saying we need to have this just transition away from fossil fuels and we need to stop developing the fossil fuel industry. And Australia signed up to that statement as well. Now we are very happy to see the Albanese Government. Passing this latest climate legislation, which is a big step forward for Australia in terms of climate policy. However, we are very disappointed to see that Australia continues to subsidise fossil fuel projects. I mean we need money in the renewable energy sector. That's where we need the money and that's where the future of our economies and our societies lie. It's not in the fossil fuel industry. So why do we continue to subsidise billions of dollars into the fossil fuel industry which we in the Pacific have agreed, including Australia, is the greatest threat to our security. And instead we talk about security in other terms, which doesn't mean much to the Pacific Islanders. I mean, submarines and increasing investment into the Australian Federal Police is very welcome. But our main security threat, as we all agree, including Australia, is climate change. And that's why we need the money to help us make this transition to resilient economies. And I'm talking about things like basic infrastructure, roads, public buildings, schools, public buildings like hospitals, government buildings, the ability for a citizen in my country to have access to good roads, good education, good health, good Internet access, good energy, 100% renewable energy supply. These are basic, you know, things that we look for out of development, and that's what we want to see assistance coming from a developed country. Partners who I must repeat,

have committed themselves to provide this support. Yeah, it is a bit disappointing to see that happening and we hope that all we can do and that's what we continue to do at each COP. We just go there and continue to say what we have to say and set the highest ambition and hope that the world will listen.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:26:40] Thank you so much for that wonderful introduction to, I guess, the key issues facing the Pacific in particular. I can see that we've got close to 260 people on the line with us today. Thank you so much for joining us. I am going to go next to Polly Hemming and then we're going to have a short discussion with the panel. And if we've got time, we're going to take a few questions from the audience so you can type those questions into the Q&A box. But thank you again to both of the ministers for joining us today. We really appreciate it. Polly, I know recently you've been involved with a delegation from Vanuatu, but I was just wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that and a little bit about the situation in Australia currently as it stands when it comes to climate policy in the Pacific?

**Polly Hemming** [00:27:35] Sure. Yeah. I think probably it's overstating my role. So I was in a delegation, Minister Regenvanu was generous enough to let me tag along with the Vanuatu delegation to witness the UN General Assembly pass a resolution to seek an opinion from the International Court of Justice on the obligation of states relating to climate change. And I knew it was a historic moment. I don't think I appreciated it quite how you know, what I was actually witnessing. And also to be accompanying the country who has largely been driving the whole movement and campaign over a number of years was it sounds trite, but it was nothing short of a privilege. And in terms of what's happening here in Australia, as you alluded to, and so I'll just give a bit of domestic context about where we're at it. As you said, just days after the election, Minister Wong flew to the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji where she gave a really heartfelt speech acknowledging that Australia had neglected the Pacific, that we let the Pacific down over a number of years and of course acknowledging again that climate, climate change is the greatest threat to the region. And she also said notably that Australia will stand shoulder to shoulder with our Pacific family in response to this crisis. And if you read the transcript of the speech carefully, collectively, it all sounds very positive, sounds very empathetic. The words that have been chosen, I think, were chosen very carefully because the minister, while the speech collectively sounds positive, the minister never actually says Australia will do anything about climate change. It will never stop. It doesn't acknowledge it is part of the problem and it will stop being part of the problem. So she skirts around it and she says will reduce our emissions in Australia with renewable energy. She says we will fund some infrastructure in the Pacific, will help the Pacific navigate this crisis, will hold a UN climate conference in partnership with the Pacific. But nowhere does she say we will stop causing the problem, which of course we're the world's third largest fossil fuel exporter. We are significant part of the problem. Similarly, you know, 12 months later, as you said, Minister Wong has visited all the countries that are part of the Pacific Islands Forum. Minister Wong visited Tuvalu and of course the Minister can speak, can elaborate on this and speak with more authority than I can, but I can only give my observations. And it seemed like things hadn't changed a great deal in terms of tone and what was being said. It was largely the same acknowledgement of the problem, you know, pulling out the line. We know climate change is an existential threat, which I think is a way of sanitising actually what is happening in Pacific countries. But largely the focus is on adaptation. The problems here will help you respond to it somewhat, but we're not going to stop causing the problem. And I think you can see why. If you look at the last 12 months of what's been happening back in Australia in terms of fossil fuels, yes, we have progressed our rollout of renewable energy. The minister, you know, has followed through with Australia, has followed through with that. We've we've we're increasing our

investment in renewable energy domestically, but we have over 100 new gas and coal mines listed in development. That's the government's words on their their own data. We just approved four new coal mines, as you said, there's 28 others awaiting approval. The Labor Government gave only almost \$2 billion to a single gas processing plant in I think it was last year's budget, a gas processing plant in the Northern Territory. And to be clear, that is over double the entire climate finance committed over four years to the Pacific. So Australia's committed 700 million, roughly over four years in climate finance to the Pacific region as a whole. We're still subsidising fossil fuels more generally. As Minister Regenvanu pointed out \$11 billion every year, which again makes climate finance look quite minimal. And the Government released data saying that our coal exports will be increasing through to 2028. And yes, we have passed the safeguard mechanism but the thing to remember with that, it is a good first step, but the way all this is being facilitated is that gas and coal mines and projects and companies don't have to reduce their emissions, they can just offset them. So we have an unlimited supply of offsets available to industry to say all this is part of our 43% reduction. And I'll just add to what Minister Regenvanu was saying about security. Our recent budget was focussed very much on the most literal definition of security. There was almost \$2 billion going to defence and police in the region, despite the fact that climate change is the greatest security threat in the region. There was nothing for climate or the Pacific and climate in the most recent budget. So that's that's a quick recap of the last, you know, the last 12 months. And of course, those are my observations and I'll defer to our guests whether what they've seen has been a positive development over the last 12 months and whether Australia really has heard the Pacific. And on that note, I'll ask Minister Paeniu, Australia has said, and Minister Wong said in that first meeting with the PIF after the Government won the election. Australia has said it will be hosting a COP in partnership with the Pacific region and this has been warmly welcomed by our Pacific family. I wanted to ask what does Australia need to do to be a credible host for the UN Climate Conference?

**Hon. Seve Paeniu** [00:34:05] Yes, so we had we had Minister Wong visiting Tuvalu as the last island nation in the Pacific to be visited by Minister Wong. I agree with your observation that, you know, she said that all the correct words in terms of the need to address climate change and the priority accorded to it, and there was a lack of initiative by the Australian Government to address the course of climate change in terms of fossil fuel. So I agree with that. So that observation, the government of Tuvalu has been supporting Australia. What we have mentioned to Penny Wong and other ministers is that we would like to support Australia's bid to host COP 31. However, Australia wanted to frame that COP as the Pacific COP, and it is in that light that we have expressed our expectation that we would only agree to the notion of framing as a Pacific COP if Australia were to come on board and support the priorities of the Pacific on climate change. And this is inclusive of fossil fuel. So the discussion we've been having about doing away with subsidies stop issuing a new licensing for further fossil fuel production, coal mines and so forth, and a commitment over time to reduce the consumption of coal and other fossil fuels in line with the 1.5 trajectory pathway. So and then on the second dimension is in terms of the capacity technology transfer. And financing that we would like to see Australia really beefing up its commitment to support the Pacific island nations to transition away from fossil fuel to renewable. And in providing that technology transfer. And also in terms of financing. So those are the two dimensions that we certainly would like Australia to make firm commitments that would enable us, the Pacific, to really support and be able to see the COP in Australia being a Pacific COP.

**Polly Hemming** [00:37:22] Thank you. I suppose so. Excuse me. Further to that, Minister Regenvanu. I think your answer will probably be similar. And this is in a similar vein. Before the election, the Labor government or the prospective Labor government said it would restore

Australia's place as first partner of choice for our Pacific family. And. I wanted to ask, so following on from Minister Paeniu answer. But has Australia done that? And if not, what does it need to do to establish? What do we need to do to establish ourselves as our as your first partner of choice?

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:38:06] Well, Australia is our first partner of choice and has been for a long time. And that's in terms of, you know, trade. We have our greatest trade with Australia. It's in terms of where most of our development assistance comes from. It's Australia, Australia's the biggest aid donor to Vanuatu and you know, long historical ties like I myself am a student of universities in Australia and a lot of the people in the in the senior level of the public service here are. So it's very close ties. Of course, you know, this goes back to black birding days. We have a this relationship and maybe that was a, you know, a bad start to the relationship, but we continue to. Australia is is our first choice partner. Inevitably. There are tensions in the relationship definitely with this. And the biggest tension is climate change and climate change policy. It is the glaring thing that is not exactly right with this relationship we have with our partner of choice. And so to, you know, to make that relationship the best it can be. Climate policy needs to be some sort of need to deal with while it continues down the road of subsidising fossil fuels, not supporting the Pacific in its climate ambitions and not recognising the main security threat to the Pacific. And that's a clear point where we diverge from Australia in terms of what we think is security. Australia as part of this quad or whatever or. That seems to have this thing of the militarising the Pacific at the moment. We are not interested in that. We interested in survival. We invested in development outcomes, social development outcomes, and that doesn't seem to be reflected, as you say, in the in the latest budget. So Australia is our partner of choice. There needs to be a lot more done on climate policy and approaches to security to make us closer.

**Polly Hemming** [00:40:23] Yeah. Yeah. No, I can. I can see that. And that's a really good point about the you know, there is a close relationship, but just sort of a schism there that that isn't an inherent tension. One of the things that I've certainly noticed is a shift in rhetoric under the new government, which is that. The Australian Government has said it will continue to subsidise and approve new gas and coal and of course we're seeing that in action. But the emissions onshore in Australia will be offset, which makes the operations and domestically net zero. So they're theoretically aligned with our climate targets, our own climate targets, not not the regions. And some of our largest gas producers are also saying that the gas that they export will be theoretically carbon neutral because offsets have been bought. Does this make a difference in any way, in your view? Is it okay to produce new gas and coal if it will be offset or if some of the emissions will be offset?

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:41:37] No, absolutely not. I mean, that's just greenwashing. We need to stop. Taking oil and gas and coal out of the ground. And we need to stop talking about, you know, abated or so on. It's very clear. I mean, we need to follow the science. We need to take into account what the science says. That should be the guide for our policy. And the science is very clear that we've got to stop taking out of the ground because there's nothing we can do to reduce emissions if we continue to take the fuel out of the ground. And a lot of the, you know, the fossil fuel industry, this is their propaganda, basically to try and convince us that they can continue doing what they've always done and they can't continue to do what they always done. They've got to stop. They've got to. There's got to be a transition we recognise. You know, we can't stop now. Just immediately like this. There's got to be a transition. But the first step of the transition is you've got to stop putting money into something that you know is destroying the world and start putting it into the solution, which is renewable energy, and start putting it into renewable energy in the Pacific to help us also move away. We are also still using fossil fuels. You've got to make that



change in your action, in your investment and in your budgeting. And if that doesn't happen, then it's just a you know, it's obscuring the reality of what's going on. And unfortunately, I think that's what this whole carbon market thing is about, is just about trying to delay the action that we all know has to happen as soon as possible.

**Polly Hemming** [00:43:22] Yeah, that actually that leads me to another question, which I'll ask both you and, and Minister Paeniu. You further to that, there's the prospect that the offsets that Australian companies our, predominantly our gas companies will be using will be coming from the Pacific. And you have mentioned that, you know, climate finance needs to be intangible infrastructure. All finance needs to be intangible infrastructure. Excuse me, Mr. Paeniu, you mentioned something similar about climate finance. Australia's entered into carbon trading deals with Fiji and Papua New Guinea and this means that carbon offsets generated in the Pacific region will ultimately be bought by Australian businesses to offset their emissions. I think I know the answer based on what you've just said, but is it carbon offsets or carbon trading deals, a legitimate form of climate finance? Because that's certainly how they seem to be being pitched globally and by Australia. Was that for? Oh, sorry. That was for. Yeah, it was for both. But Minister Paeniu, you. If I could ask you to answer that one first.

**Hon. Seve Paeniu** [00:44:40] Yeah. No, it isn't. Because it doesn't address the core problem, which is extracting that would still enable Australia to do business as usual. Keep extracting fossil fuel, which is the culprit of all of this and burning that would still further contribute to climate, climate change and sea level rise for us in the Pacific. We our preference has been quite clear. We would like climate and development finance in the form of grants. If not in the most lenient and soft concessional financing. Our economies are already overburdened by debt and that distress and therefore we cannot have additional financing that would put more debt on our economies. And that's why our focus and our preference would be a grant financed financing or concessional financing. Now that we are talking about financing. It has been our view of the Pacific Island countries that all these international financial mechanisms, while they are out there, it has been very challenging and difficult for small Pacific Island nations to access. So there are complex access procedures. They need to be simplified to enable countries to readily access them. It needed to come at scale, so rather than small, piecemeal project funding. It needed to be comprehensive and at scale and. Therefore the financial mechanism and the mortality. And we are talking about the UNCCC now coming up with the loss and damage fund. So these are need to be designed in a way that countries that do need that assistance would be able to readily access at scale. So there is now an international call for a review of the multilateral development banks and international financial institutions to align the policy objectives to the Paris Agreement 1.5 powerfully into just transition and so forth. So these are the points that we keep on advocating for within this international global financial order and system. And also in terms of these specific financial mechanisms like the the Loss and Damage Fund.

**Polly Hemming** [00:48:00] And Minister Regenvanu do you have anything you'd like to add to that? I think you're on mute still. Sorry.

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:48:12] We're still talking about climate. Yeah. Carbon trading as a as a solution AS Yeah, Oh yeah.

**Polly Hemming** [00:48:20] As a, as a form of finance. But also I suppose Minister Paeniu sort of broadened it to, you know, what climate finance should actually look like. I'm.

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:48:32] Yeah. Okay, So. There's a lot of you know, I think the the concept of climate finance has been deliberately made very obtuse so that in the UN F triple C negotiations, the rich developed countries can be can continue to like delay and not commit. It's been it has never been clear how much of what types of climate finance and development are being allocated to the cities, for example? And I think it's been quite deliberate so that this confusion can continue to be maintained, especially at the at the level of the UNFCCC. We've seen. Attempts to track climate financing coming into the Pacific. But it's it's made very difficult by the fact that, you know, we still talk what what what is what is climate finance. So and this lack of credibility. Is a clear factor that's eroded. Of course, our trust it is a national climate negotiations. And while we push so hard for a loss and damage fund. Right now. The scale of finance, as Mr. Paeniu says, is wholly unavailable to us. We hear this big figure, we get this tiny little amount out of a tiny percentage of it. For example, we've probably received Vanuatu. It's about 300 million USD in total over the all the years from high finance. And you compare this to, you know, the single year target of 10 billion. The Pacific Island Forum estimates that we get 2% of global climate finance, even though we are the most vulnerable region in the world. And of course, I come back to Polly's point. You compare what we receive in climate finance compared to the subsidies given to the fossil fuel industry. And it's just it's pretty outrageous, I think. Yeah, I think that's all I can say about that. I think that there needs to be a lot more couched in development terms for us. Really. Our future development trajectories in the Pacific are building climate resilient economies that can withstand the coming extreme, extremely hazardous world we're moving into that we're already experiencing now. We need to be ready for that and we need assistance. Be ready for that. And the world has said they will assist us and we need to see that assistance actually forthcoming for that purpose and not sort of obfuscating the problem and continuing to create the source of our problem while saying you're going help us do something about it. Not actually doing much.

**Polly Hemming** [00:51:32] Actually, that leads really well into my my final question. You know, where are the other voices in this conversation? Small island states, whether it's in the Pacific or in the Caribbean, hold enormous moral authority in global climate debates. And in fact, actually, Pacific Island countries hold a lot of, I think, diplomatic leverage in our region. But what about globally? You know, where where is the geopolitical traction, I suppose, to do Pacific Island nations that need more public backing by, say, larger trading blocks like the EU or of the big countries. Even from the moral point of view, before we even get to, you know, the issues of financing or more formal alliances. That's sorry to you, Minister Regenvanu.

**Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** [00:52:28] Yes, well. Things are not looking good for these big regional blocs. We just had the G7 coming out and essentially promoting gas. In this day and age in 2023, it's kind of unbelievable, really. But the EU is probably the most progressive in terms of a bloc that supports good climate policy and is actually doing something about it and making some commitments. With other regions. I think it's not so much regional blocs we're seeing, for example, when we refer to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. Lots of support from states, cities. Which is fantastic, which builds the momentum towards national adoption. We do see things like Minister Plenary referred to the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance initiative that is actually led by Denmark and includes countries such as France. So we're seeing some of the countries moving, moving that way. And that's encouraging, but of course, the biggest players in the room are not moving fast enough. The US China. India. Australia, of course, for us is the big player in the region. And we need to see them. Especially countries like Australia, which are part of the Pacific, you know, the part of the Pacific Islands Forum who are with us in in the region. Starting to take on a lot more about what we're saying in terms of climate policy and our security and safety needs

into the future, because as I said earlier, these are the areas where it's quite discordant between what the Pacific wants and what Australia is doing. And I think especially coming into this so-called Pacific COP, there needs to be a lot more examination of that relationship and particularly around climate policy and climate finance. And Vanuatu, for one, will be encouraging that discussion as we start to figure out what this cop is going to look like.

**Polly Hemming** [00:54:51] I'm not sure if we got if I got time to extend that question to Mr. Paeniu. You. Yes, very, very quickly. No, I don't have a minute of minutes. I was just going to ask you, Minister Paeniu, you were where the other global voices are that are, I suppose, backing in the calls of small island states or Pacific countries in particular.

**Hon. Seve Paeniu** [00:55:12] Yeah, I think it's just quite challenging for a small block. So it's formally called in the U.N. The U.S. is the alliance of small island states because we have other major blocks in our way. But I think I'm seeing some some small steps, positive steps in terms of the efficacy, you know, in these international global financial institutions, which I represent, Tuvalu in many of these organisations, their meetings, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the IMF. I just returned from Bangkok for the U.N. ESCAP meeting and climate change and the impact of climate change and trying to align the policy accordingly. The Asian Development Bank now is now trying to restructure itself as the Asia Pacific Climate Bank. So I think there's now an increasing awareness and action to really try and address the issue. So in terms of the international internships or mental multilateral organisations, I think there is a movement there. But I think the the main crux and the importance of the issue lies with national governments, and that's where the challenge we are facing.

**Polly Hemming** [00:56:59] Thank you so much, everyone, for your time. I'm afraid we're not going to have time to get to any questions from the audience, but we thank you all so much for joining us today. And in particular, I want to thank our guests, Minister Seve Paeniu and Minister Ralph Regenvanu , as well as the Edmund Rice Centre and Mr. 'Alopi Latukefu. We really appreciate all your contributions. And Polly Hemming, my colleague as well. We do have many more upcoming webinars coming up, including one with Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien about their new book on The Voice to Parliament Handbook. So make sure you check out our website and subscribe so you can hear about that. As I said, this will go up as a recording on our website and also on our YouTube channel so you can find this there and we'll also try and upload it as a podcast. Thank you so much for joining us today. We had over 550 people registered for this, so a huge interest and we appreciate that interest a lot. And I'm sure it won't be the last time that we're talking about climate change and the Pacific. Thanks so much for joining us today, everyone. We'll see you next time. Bye.