

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy

The “5-15 per cent” targets announced by the Australian government on greenhouse gas emissions must be improved before December’s important UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen. These weak targets pose a major diplomatic and political problem for our Pacific island neighbours, which are amongst the most vulnerable nations facing environmental, social and economic impacts from climate change.

Rapidly changing climate science has highlighted the need for much higher reduction targets than in existing Australian policy, to create a “safe climate.” The extent of the current climate emergency will require stronger targets for stabilisation of atmospheric carbon to avoid catastrophic consequences.

Some Pacific governments have welcomed the fact that after the election of a new Labor government in November 2007, Australia has finally ratified the Kyoto Protocol, pledged money for adaptation and set emissions reduction targets. However many Pacific civil society organisations have been sharply critical of the Australian and New Zealand governments’ current policies and targets on greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches has stated:

“A proposed reduction of between 5-15% in greenhouse gas emissions will not put a dent in the global efforts to reduce the effects of climate change. We looked to Australia as a country that has the future of the Pacific region at heart. With all the millions of dollars of assistance to the Pacific region to address climate change, the Australian government now places green house gas emission targets at such a level that would render this much appreciated assistance null and void. This announcement is inconsistent with the overall actions of the Rudd government to date on climate change in the Pacific region...20-25% emissions reduction by 2020 based on 1990s level was the absolute minimum. Australia has just outdone the minimum!”¹

AOSIS argues for stronger targets

In the lead up to the December 2009 Copenhagen negotiations, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – which includes our Pacific island neighbours - is advocating mitigation scenarios which talk of emissions pathways to reach a temperature limit well below 1.5 degrees. As AOSIS argued at the December 2008 UNFCC Climate Conference in Poznan:

“The avoidance of climate change impacts on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) must be one of the key benchmarks for assessing the appropriateness of any long-term goal. The long term global goal must be sufficient to ensure that long-term temperature increases are stabilised well below 1.5°C. A 2°C increase compared to pre-industrial levels would have devastating consequences on SIDS due to resulting sea level rise, coral bleaching, coastal erosion, changing precipitation patterns, increased incidence and re-emergence of climate related diseases and the impacts of increasingly frequent and severe weather events.”²

¹ “Pacific Churches thank Australia for its leadership to effectively wipe out the Pacific region”, Pacific Conference of Churches media release, 16 December 2008.

² *AOSIS Input into the “Shared Vision” Assembly Document*, UNFCC Climate Conference, Poznan, December 2008 (Alliance of Small Island States, 2008).

As scientific studies are continuing to report new data that was not included in the most recent IPCC report, a number of leading researchers now argue that to maintain a safe climate will require a concentration of less than 350ppm CO₂e, not the outdated 450-550ppm CO₂e on which many current proposals are based.

The December 2008 UNFCCC climate conference in Poznan continued a debate on the need to shift towards safe global targets involving a much tougher policy on greenhouse reduction targets. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has argued that the long-term target as a stabilisation of GHG concentrations should be well below 350 ppm CO₂e and temperature increases limited to well below 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level, in order to limit sea level rise to levels that minimise adverse effects.³ Greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2015 and global CO reductions of greater than 85 per cent are required by 2050.

To meet this target, Annex I countries, as a group, would need to reduce their GHG emissions by more than 40% of 1990 levels by 2020, and more than 95% by 2050.

These stronger targets have been endorsed by Pacific neighbours such as the government of Tuvalu, which argued at the recent Bonn UNFCCC Ad Hoc Working Group on further commitments for Annex 1 parties under the Kyoto Protocol:

“Being one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, Tuvalu believes that there should be a global response to reducing emissions. The aggregate response by Annex 1 and Non-Annex 1 countries should ensure that atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations are stabilised well below 330ppm CO₂. This would hopefully mean that global average surface temperature increase should be well below 12.5 degree C above pre-industrial levels and the global greenhouse gas emission must peak by 2015 at the latest”.⁴

Australia’s responsibility to Pacific neighbours

Development of climate policy must draw on core principles which acknowledge the historic responsibility of industrialised nations to address the impacts of global warming, based on:

- polluter-pays principle
- principle of common but differentiated responsibilities
- precautionary principle
- principle of state responsibility for activities within their jurisdiction
- principle of inter-generational equity

The domestic debate over Australia’s weak Emissions Trading Scheme has overshadowed the importance of boosting Australia’s commitment to adequate funding for adaptation in our region. The official communiqué from the Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting in 2008 stressed:

“The priority of Pacific SIDS is securing sustainable financing for immediate and effective implementation of concrete adaptation programmes on the ground.”⁵

³ AOSIS *Input into the “Shared Vision” Assembly Document*, UNFCCC Climate Conference, Poznan, December 2008 (Alliance of Small Island States, 2008).

⁴ Submission by Tuvalu on the scale of emission reductions to be achieved by Annex 1 parties and allocation of corresponding mitigation effort, UNFCCC Ad Hoc Working Group on further commitments for Annex 1 parties under the Kyoto Protocol, seventh session, Bonn, April 2009.

⁵ Forum communiqué, Pacific Islands Forum, Niue, August 2008.

The Labor government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has announced the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ICCAI), pledging to invest \$150 million over three years from 2008-2011 to meet high priority climate adaptation needs in vulnerable countries. But Pacific island countries have argued for even greater funding to be allocated for adaptation programs, as they have insufficient resources to address the adverse effects of global warming. Tuvalu's Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia has been outspoken on the issue, stating:

“It is very clear that financial resources for adaptation are completely inadequate. Last year Oxfam International suggested that the adaptation needs of developing countries will cost a minimum of US\$50 billion per year . . . We believe new and additional sources of funding must be identified and channelled through the recently established Adaptation Fund to help fund concrete adaptation projects in-country to adapt to the impacts of climate change, while ensuring long term survival and livelihoods in our God-given lands.”⁶

A central message coming from Pacific governments is that this funding should be *new and additional money rather than the reallocation of existing ODA funds*. At the UNFCCC conference in Poland, AOSIS argued for:

“Availability of new and sufficient financial resources separate from the current ODA commitments to vulnerable countries, especially the SIDS and LDCs, to assist them in building their capacities, implementing adequate adaptation measures and accessing appropriate technology to respond to the challenge of climate change.”

The announcement by Minister Penny Wong that \$20 million of the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative will be used for scientific research and building a regional science network⁷ highlights the need to develop mechanisms that allow resources to be focussed on village level activities, instead of being soaked up in consultancies and scientific studies. A greater proportion of funding from adaptation funds need to be allocated to implementation of basic resilience programs at community level, rather than further studies.

A significant amount of funds from Australia's Adaptation Initiative will be channelled through the World Bank, even though the World Bank's proposed Pilot Program on Climate Resilience will offer loan finance for adaptation.

It is immoral that funds from the World Bank are being offered as loans, rather than grants. By accepting loans rather than grants, the poorest nations in the world which will have to repay the funds, even though the industrialised donor countries have created the historic legacy of greenhouse gas emissions. This places the burden on those vulnerable developing countries least able to afford it.

Consistent with the polluter-pays principle, adaptation funding for developing countries should be in the form of grants and Australian funding of climate adaptation should be channelled through the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund.

⁶ Statement to the General debate of the 63rd UN General Assembly, 27 September 2008.

⁷ “\$20 Million for Climate Change in the Pacific”, Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change And Water and Mr Stephen Smith, Minister For Foreign Affairs, Media Release 23 March 2009
http://www.ausaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID=4432_2782_9746_8049_8616