



Climate Change Mitigation: Australia's responsibility to the Pacific



The terms defined

Mitigation aims to avoid the unmanageable impacts of climate change

Climate Change Impacts and the need to Mitigate

Small Island States within the Pacific are among the most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change. Climate change is already affecting the economies and communities of Pacific Island Nations with revenue loss across sectors such as agriculture, water resources, forestry, tourism and other industry-related sectors¹. Increases in sea level rise and cyclones greatly threaten the health and livelihoods of Pacific communities. There is a risk that some small island states such as the Maldives, Tuvalu and Kiribati could eventually be submerged altogether², as a consequence of sea level rise.

By contrast, through continued reliance upon emissions intensive industries and energy sources, the Australian economy continues to prosper ensuring it is more capable of a sophisticated adaptation response. There is profound inequity within this dynamic and calls for wealthy nations to **act first and fast** in efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change must be made.

Status of Mitigation Efforts in Australia

Australia's efforts to date with regards to mitigating climate change have been far from progressive. The key reason for this delay in climate action is Australia's dependence upon emissions intensive industries such as coal mining, generation of coal fired electricity, oil and gas extraction, minerals extraction and agriculture. Australia's reliance upon coal fired electricity renders the country to be the highest emitter per capita within the OECD². There is strong pressure upon the Australian Government from lobby groups representing these industries to limit the impact that any mitigation efforts might have upon the competitiveness of emissions intensive Australian exports and the viability of the industries in question.

The short sightedness of protecting industries reliant upon finite resources over addressing the long term and damaging impacts of climate change is difficult to comprehend. The delay in Federal action has seen some encouraging proposals coming from the Australian states and territories (primarily Victoria) however the ideal outcome would be the implementation of an effective nation-wide scheme, in order to reduce administrative costs and complexities, whilst ensuring complete coverage.

1. International Fund for Agricultural Development:
<http://www.ifad.org/events/apr09/impact/islands.pdf>

2. Jane McAdam, Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives (2010) HART Publishing, 1.

3.
<http://www.garnautreview.org.au/chp7.htm>



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Mitigation initiatives currently being considered by the Australian Government include placing a cost on carbon, either through an Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) or a carbon tax. Complementary measures, such as nurturing the widespread deployment of energy efficient and carbon sequestration technologies through funding allocation have also been discussed. The outcome of the recent Federal election and the strong presence of the Australian Greens in the Senate increases the likelihood of an effective scheme being introduced however this will also inform increased efforts from fossil fuel lobby groups (which are being consulted in the design of a carbon pricing mechanism) to limit the business impacts of any scheme.

The Message to Send to Australia

It is the responsibility of wealthy, emissions intensive nations to act first and fast in efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This will both protect their own industries and communities which are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and also minimise climate change impacts upon Small Island States within the Asia-Pacific region. The key messages to send to the Australian Government are as follows:

- To think beyond the immediate benefits of the minerals/mining boom when designing a carbon pricing mechanism;
- To be a global leader by setting aggressive emission reduction targets – *at least* 25% reduction (of 1990 levels) by 2020, regardless of international action. This will provide greater credibility when pushing for larger emitters (such as the US) to act accordingly;
- To actively support international mitigation measures to reduce global emissions, and to plan for and support Pacific nations to adapt to climate change impacts which are now inevitable; and
- To consider and plan for the requirements of environmental refugees within the Pacific, as a consequence of the impacts of climate change.

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