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# Watermark

Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW)



## Calling out across the seas

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### Introduction

You may remember that the first issue of **Watermark** in 2008 featured an interview with Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs, who works with the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP). In our last issue of **Watermark** for the year, we will again be highlighting the work of the PCP.

In October of this year, the PCP held a forum at the Australian Catholic University in Strathfield. The forum aimed to demonstrate how a human rights approach can be taken towards climate action in the Pacific. This comes at an interesting time in Australia's political history, as debates are taking place over whether or not Australia should adopt a bill of rights.

With the recent release of the Government's White Paper on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, which contains a low emissions reductions target of 5-15% from 2000 levels by 2020, a new perspective on climate change is in order. The human impact of climate change is what we, and our politicians, should be considering. This not only means the future of the world's children, but also those who are feeling the effects of global warming *now*, particularly our neighbours living on low-lying islands.



## Climate change: a *human* issue

The Pacific Calling Partnership made a strong impression on politicians and locals alike when they visited Bali in 2007, to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference. In October this year, the PCP gathered in Sydney to develop recommendations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was held in Pozan, Poland, earlier this month. The focus of the PCP forum was to explore how a human rights framework could best be used to address the pressing ecological issues faced in the Pacific. The lives and cultures of many of our Pacific Island neighbours (including people of Australia's Torres Strait Islands) are under threat from the rising sea levels and unpredictable weather created by global warming. While this pressing situation can be seen as an ecological issue, or even an economic issue, it is ultimately a *human* issue. It is fundamentally about human rights; about the right of all peoples to nationality and to culture.

The PCP recognises that climate justice can only be achieved if people, particularly politicians, see the human need behind these complex ecological issues. As Geraldine Kearney expressed earlier this year, meeting with those who are directly affected by climate change puts "the flesh and bones on the facts and figures".

"What is happening to our right to a livelihood, to our safety, to our water, to our culture? Our President is looking for partnership with Australia so that our people can be skilled and equipped to be part of an orderly migration process. We want to come to Australia. We want to be contributing citizens. But will you have us? Will you really form this partnership? Do you really believe this catastrophe is happening?"

- Claire Anterea of Kiribati

At the PCP forum, representatives from Australian and Pacific islands shared their personal experiences of climate change, and special speaker Bonita Mabo lent her practice with civil and land rights to the discussion. Perhaps the saddest aspect of these island nations' predicament is that they have contributed very little to the emissions that have caused global warming. This is indeed a human issue, not only because it affects the lives of islanders, but because it requires fundamental change in the lives of all those who live in countries that produce irresponsible emissions.



Demonstrating the rich culture of the Pacific island nations that are under threat.

At the forum's conclusion, those who attended compiled several recommendations for the Poznan meeting, directed at both a national and an international level. Emission cuts were naturally listed as a key priority, but the PCP also stressed that "Australia must take a lead in the Pacific region promoting human rights as central to all policies and actions taken to deal with climate change". As displacement is sadly an inevitability for many people who live on low-lying islands, the PCP's recommendations also suggested "an international agreement setting out the rights and obligations of states in relation to people displaced by climate change".

The questions asked by Sr Claire Anterea (quoted above) must be considered now. It is easy for Australians to ignore the effects of global warming that we cannot see. But emissions don't respect political borders, and Australia, as a wealthy and developed nation, must be accountable for the consequences of our pollution-producing lifestyles.

Taking a human-rights based approach to climate change may help us to see the "flesh and bones on the facts and figures". If we, as individuals or as a nation, need any further motivation to cut our emissions, surely witnessing the struggle of people to hold onto their culture, rights and lives would be enough.

If you would like more information about the PCP and their work, visit the Edmund Rice Centre website (<http://www.erc.org.au>) and follow the 'Pacific Calling Partnership' link on the left of the screen. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved for anyone who is interested.

# Target drops, temperatures rise.

When regarding climate change from a new human-rights centred approach, Australia's ecological policy acquires even more gravity. As such, it is all the more disappointing that in the White Paper on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, released last week, the Federal Government has set very conservative targets for Australia's emissions reductions by 2020.

Despite the mandate for bold climate action, and consistent campaigning by environmental groups for a 25-40% reduction target, the Government has kicked climate change mitigation in Australia off to a very slow start. The White Paper acknowledges that "We can either wait and allow the challenges to get worse, or we can take action. The Australian people have chosen action." Yet given the 5-15% target set by the Government, it seems appropriate to repeat Claire Anterea's question: "Do you really believe this catastrophe is happening?"

A rise of 2 degrees Celsius is seen to be the maximum that global temperatures can rise before climate change becomes dangerous and radically destructive. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has suggested that a 25-40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 is required by developed countries such as Australia if this 2 degree rise is not to be exceeded. A rise greater than 2 degrees would mean the inundation of Pacific and Australian islands and, according to the Australian Conservation Foundation, irreparable damage to the Great Barrier Reef, the Murray-Darling Basin and the Australian Alps.

Australia's reduction target will only rise from 5% to 15% if an international agreement can be reached during climate talks in 2009. The international ramifications of this low target are perhaps the most saddening. By setting an ambitious target, Australia could have sent a strong message to other industrialised nations across the world. This would have allowed other countries to confidently work towards bringing down carbon emissions globally. Given that Australia's landscape and economy has so much to lose if climate change escalates, it is puzzling that the Federal Government did not seize this opportunity to make a difference.

Prime Minister Rudd claims that in the current unstable economic climate, a lower target is "responsible". However, the prevailing theme of the Ross Garnaut's Report about the effects of climate change on the economy, is that Australia's economy *depends* on fast and effective climate change mitigation. Prime Minister Rudd is right to believe that there is a way to be both ecologically and economically responsible at the same time. Unfortunately, it seems that a reduction in emissions as low as 5% is simply not enough to meet these responsibilities.



Disappointing; Climate Change Minister Penny Wong and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd are standing by their decision to set a low 5-15% target for Australia's carbon emissions reductions by 2020.

Image from: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/rudd-to-let-indous-nuclear-deal-go-ahead-20080708-3bwg.html>

The White Paper also revealed that the Federal Government will give polluting companies and industries free carbon permits in the initial phases of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. This is yet another way in which Australia's crucial response to climate change will be slowed. The Australian Conservation Foundation expressed concerns that this approach could "herald a new era of pollution protectionism".

Do you think that a 5-15% reduction of 2000 emissions by 2020 is enough? If you would like to express your opinion about this crucial economic, ecological and human-rights issue, we encourage you to write a letter to your Federal Member, to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and to the Minister for Climate Change, Penny Wong. Follow the link on page 4 to find the addresses of your political representatives.

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We are on the Web!  
[www.clrinsw.org](http://www.clrinsw.org)

You can read past  
issues of  
*Watermark*  
on our website!

## Sisters on the Planet

Oxfam and Make Poverty History are highlighting the unique impact of climate change on women, through the release of their 'Sisters on the Planet' DVD. The film shows six different stories of women across the world who are battling climate change in their own exceptional ways. In many areas, women are hit hardest by climate change, as their family responsibilities can tie them to areas where climate conditions are unfavourable. Economic and educational disadvantage can also mean that women's abilities to respond to climate changes can be limited. However, 'Sisters on the Planet' shows that women in all walks of life are fighting back with resilience, passion and with all of the resources they have at hand. Helen Henry, one of the women whose story appears in the film, spoke at the Sydney launch of 'Sisters on the Planet'. She gave a very important message, saying: "We must not wait for the perfect moment; the perfect moment will never come." She stressed the importance of acting *now*, and acting with love and generosity to "preserve each other's parts of the world".



The inspirational video is available for free download online, at: <http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/climate-change/take-action/sisters-on-the-planet> You are encouraged to watch the DVD and show it to your friends to continue raising awareness.

### BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR

The CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee would like to thank you for reading *Watermark* throughout 2008. We hope that you have found it to be a valuable resource in any



efforts you have been making to keep up with current ecological issues. *Watermark* will return in 2009 to bring you more information and tips on how to be a cleaner, greener global citizen! If you would like to access any of our previous issues, please visit our website <http://www.clrinsw.org> and scroll down to the bottom of the 'What's New' page.

We hope that all of our readers had a wonderful Christmas and New Year - a time filled with the peace of Christ and the joy of the Good News. If you would like tips on how to have an environmentally friendly Christmas in 2009, check out:

[http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news\\_id=2085](http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news_id=2085)

### Links and Ways to Help!

Access to the PCP through the Edmund Rice Centre website

<http://www.erc.org.au>

Read the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme White Paper

<http://www.climatechange.gov.au/emissionstrading/index.html>

Grassroots Australian Climate Action

<http://www.risingtide.org.au>

Australian Conservation Foundation

<http://www.acfonline.org.au>

Climate Action Network Australia

<http://www.cana.net.au>

Sisters on the Planet Campaign

<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/climate-change/take-action/sisters-on-the-planet/>

Members of Parliament contact details

<http://www.aph.gov.au/whoswho/index.htm>

CLRI(NSW) Website

<http://www.clrinsw.org>