

**AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO
THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Australia considers climate change to be a serious long-term global challenge that will incrementally intensify climate-related stresses, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise and resource availability. Over time, these climate change impacts are also expected to contribute additional stresses to local and regional stability, and resource and food security, and therefore, potentially to human rights.

Australia is particularly concerned with the effect of climate change on low-lying small island states of the Pacific. We are taking a leadership role in addressing climate change issues within the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia strongly supports the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Australia has intensified efforts to achieve MDGs, spending approximately A\$3.2 billion in aid in 2007-08 and allocating A\$3.7 billion for 2008-09. By 2015, Australia will increase its aid to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income.

Adaptation to climate change in the Pacific and the developing world more generally is fundamentally about improving and protecting development outcomes. To the extent that better development outcomes are linked to the aspirational economic and social rights reflected in the various human rights instruments (eg Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and potentially Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and any other instruments developed since the mid 1990s), effective adaptation strategies are also a substantial contributor.

A. National level assessments of the impact of climate change (experienced or anticipated) on human lives and on populations most affected and vulnerable

The Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provides a national assessment of the impacts of climate change on human lives and populations most affected by and vulnerable to climate change.

The AR4 suggests that the most significant human health impact of climate change is likely to be an increase in heat-related deaths. The Australian annual death rate in people aged over 65 is also estimated to increase. Other impacts include alterations to the geographical range of some infectious diseases and increases in mental health and suicide rates related to droughts in rural areas.

The Allen's Report (2005)¹, commissioned by the Australian Greenhouse Office (now Department of Climate Change) establishes a risk management approach to identifying the sectors and regions that have the highest priority for adaptation planning. This approach allows the Government to consider a range of factors, including social vulnerabilities that influence adaptive capacity.

¹ Allen Consulting Group 'Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability – Promoting an Efficient Adaptation Response in Australia,' Report to the Australian Greenhouse Office, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Commonwealth of Australian, March 2005.

The AR4 suggests that indigenous populations, including in Australia, are particularly vulnerable. It suggests that Australian indigenous populations are particularly vulnerable as a result of the remoteness of many of their communities and resulting infrastructure, health services and employment matters. In addition, they are vulnerable because of strong cultural connections between the health of their country, their belief systems and their mental and physical well-being. This reduces coping ability and may restrict adaptive capacity, reducing these communities' resilience to climate change and cultural cohesion.

The Department of Climate Change has engaged consultants to undertake a multi-disciplinary study of the risks of climate change to Indigenous communities in the tropical north of Australia. It is anticipated that the study will identify knowledge gaps and future on-ground priorities.

B. National level studies carried out, including by independent research institutions, on the relationship between climate change and human rights

To date, Australia has not carried out national level studies of this kind.

C. National level projects and measures to mitigate or adapt to climate change, including information on any assessments of the impact of such projects and measures on affected populations and their human rights

Domestically, Australia is committed to: meeting its Kyoto target; reducing emissions by 60 per cent on 2000 levels by 2050; establishing an emissions trading scheme by 2010; and a 20 per cent target for renewable energy by 2020.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework*, at its meeting on 13 April 2007, as the basis for government action on adaptation over the next five to seven years.

The Adaptation Framework includes possible actions to assist the most vulnerable sectors and regions, such as agriculture, biodiversity, fisheries, forestry, settlements and infrastructure, coastal, water resources, tourism and health to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The Australian Government has also committed funding of up to A\$126 million over five years for domestic climate change adaptation which will:

- drive national efforts to increase Australia's ability to respond effectively to the impacts of climate change;
- provide decision-makers with the information and tools they need to understand and assess the risks of climate change impacts;
- work with partners to demonstrate adaptation approaches that deliver multiple benefits;
- facilitate and supporting businesses, communities and governments to develop and implement strategies to manage their risks from the impacts of climate change; and
- deliver a number of important policy, program and research functions, coordinated through a new Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (see also below).

Key Adaptation Initiatives

The Government has announced significant adaptation initiatives, for example:

- ‘Caring for our Coasts’ – the Australian Government has allocated A\$25 million to focus on adaptation in the coastal zone. With 85 per cent of Australians living within 50km of the coast, climate change will present significant risks to the health of Australia’s coastal environments and communities.
- ‘Great Barrier Reef Rescue Plan’ – A\$200 million plan to increase resilience of the reef to climate change. More than 63,000 people are employed in the Great Barrier Reef tourism, fishing and cultural/recreation related industries, which together generate more than A\$6 billion in GDP each year. An aspect of this initiative will involve building partnerships with Indigenous communities.
- ‘Australia’s Farming Future’ – A\$130 million for drought, climate change and primary industries. An aspect of this initiative will assist primary producers to cope with the social impacts of climate change including changes to farm business structures, community demographics, health outcomes and wellbeing.

Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility

The Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility will be hosted by a leading science institution and will lead the research community in a national interdisciplinary effort to help government, industry and community decision makers manage the risks from the potential impacts of climate change. Proposals are now being invited from existing research institutions to establish this Facility.

Proposals will be accepted from those research institutions with the capacity to provide national research leadership, foster collaboration among research institutions and deliver cross-sectoral benefits right across Australia.

Australian Government funding of up to A\$50 million over five years will be available to support the work of the Facility. The successful organisation will be expected to bring additional cash and/or in-kind resources to support the Facility.

CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship Programme

The CSIRO Flagship is delivering scientific solutions to advance Australia’s most vital national objectives. Through partnerships, the flagship will deliver the best available scientific information and expertise to support Australia's efforts to adapt to climate change today in a practical and effective way. The Flagship's research is led by some of Australia's pre-eminent climate scientists, and will add significant value to how we adapt. The four research themes are:

- *Pathways to adaptation* including climate projections, social and economic analyses of vulnerabilities and adaptation options, international impacts and understanding stakeholder values.
- *Sustainable cities and coasts* including new building and infrastructure design, urban development projects and integration of social economic and environmental analyses to assist communities, industries and governments to adapt at regional scales.

- *Managing species and ecosystems* including predicting the responses of natural systems to climate change, reducing threats and incorporating climate change adaptation measures into conservation and natural resource management policies and strategies.
- *Adaptive primary industries, enterprises and communities* including providing practical adaptation strategies to sustain livelihoods, participatory engagement, adaptation tools for primary producers and management techniques and technologies to enable industries and enterprises to adapt and take advantage of opportunities

D. Views on the relationship between obligations arising out of international climate conventions and international human rights treaties, including on international assistance and cooperation

An effective mitigation and adaptation response to climate change will alleviate its impacts on nations, which will in turn, reduce the risk to human rights. Adaptation to climate change in the developing work more generally is fundamentally about improving and protecting development outcomes and hence human rights.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international forum for addressing international climate change action. It is the most relevant multilateral mechanism and has the mandate of the international community.

Australia has ratified the Kyoto Protocol and is an active and constructive participant in the UN Climate Convention negotiations toward a post-2012 outcome on climate change.

Australia supports the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, launched in 2005, and the Bali Action Plan, launched in 2007.

Australia strongly supports the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is substantially increasing its international development assistance investment in key MDG-relevant sectors, including water supply and sanitation and climate change – in 2008-09 Australia will provide A\$3.7 billion in aid, including over A\$130 million for environment and climate change programs.

The issue of human rights and the environment is also under consideration in the context of the draft Fourth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme IV). The existing draft text on human rights and the environment would create a new area of work for the United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) environmental law division. It would task UNEP with gathering, analysing and disseminating information about the extent to which national laws adopt and use rights-base approaches to environmental problems and how international human rights bodies address environment-related issues.

E. Examples of support to mitigate and adapt to climate change through international assistance and cooperation, bilaterally and through multilateral institutions, including assessments of their human rights impact

Australia recognises the significant threat to human rights posed by climate change. The Australian Government has announced several initiatives designed to assist vulnerable communities in the Asia-Pacific region increase their resilience to the effects of climate change (see below).

Mitigation of global greenhouse gas emissions plays a vital role in reducing the risk posed by climate change to human rights in our region and Australia's domestic initiatives in this regard and active participation in the UNFCCC process will complement our assistance for adaptation and resilience building in the Asia-Pacific.

Australia's aid program is committed to assisting partner countries in our region alleviate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Australia recognises that, in time and unchecked, climate change is likely to result in significant reversals in the development gains the Asia-Pacific has made in recent years.

Key international climate change and environment initiatives

The Australian Government has, in its Budget for 2008-09, increased aid in all major sectors contributing to MDG outcomes, including expenditure on environment and climate change programs. Climate change mitigation and adaptation will be high priorities for the aid program in the years ahead. Australia will provide strong support for practical action at the bilateral and regional level, participate actively in multilateral initiatives and give careful attention to ensuring the climate resilience of Australia's aid investments generally.

The Australian Government has committed:

- A\$150 million over three years from 2008-09, to assist countries in our region assess and adapt to the likely impacts of climate change. The initiative comprises four components:
 - (a) the production of robust scientific information on, and enhanced awareness of, climate change impacts;
 - (b) support and capacity building for partner countries to develop useful, prioritised adaptation strategies based on targeted vulnerability assessments;
 - (c) financial and technical support for the implementation of adaptation measures by partner countries, including support for the coordination at regional and national levels of external adaptation assistance; and
 - (d) support for selected multilateral climate change adaptation financing mechanisms.
- A\$300 million over three years on MDG-related efforts to improve access to clean water and basic sanitation. The Water and Sanitation Initiative aims to provide access to clean water and effective sanitation and to improve water security by protecting freshwater sources. The initiative will support a substantially increased investment in sanitation services while also expanding the provision of sustainable and safe water supply systems, especially for the poorest. It will support a growth in investment in urban and peri-urban water and sanitation services along with further investments in rural water supply and sanitation programs.
- A\$200 million over five years, including A\$39 million in 2008-09, for Australia's International Forest Carbon Initiative, which aims to demonstrate that reducing emissions from deforestation can be part of an effective international response to climate change. Early priorities under the International Forest Carbon Initiative have included forest carbon partnerships with Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, contributions of A\$11.7 million to the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, and participation in international efforts to link national, regional, and international systems to monitor forest cover and carbon levels.

An important aim of Australia's adaptation measures in the Pacific is to increase the capacity of countries and communities to deal with climate change impacts, such as exacerbation of resource scarcity and changes in patterns of vector borne diseases, which may have significant impacts on human development and thus human rights.

In addition to the measures listed above, Australia funds several ongoing climate change monitoring and adaptation activities in the Pacific region, totalling over A\$40 million since 1991. Current programs include:

- . The Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, which collects high quality, long term data on absolute sea level movements across the Pacific to assist Pacific countries monitor and plan for changes in sea level.
- . The Climate Prediction Project, which builds capacity of meteorological services to interpret weather and climate data and provide climate prediction support to industry, government and community stakeholders.
- . The Vulnerability and Adaptation Initiative, which provides communities in the Pacific practical adaptation assistance such as increased water storage, improved food security through crop diversification, and coastal stabilisation through mangrove replanting.
- . Work also under the Australia-New Zealand Climate Change Partnership includes the creation of a tropical cyclones database and rescue of historic data records with the aim of providing more accurate climatic data and modelling in the Pacific.

Australia has also contributed to the Least Developed Countries Fund of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (A\$7.5m 2007-08) and provides core funding to the:

- . Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) (A\$1.4m: 2007-08);
- . Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), (A\$1.8m: 2007-08). (SPREP and SOPAC programs include activities addressing climate change and adaptation and renewable energy); and
- . Global Environment Facility (GEF) (\$59.8m to the 4th replenishment: 2006-2010). Since 1991, Australia has committed over \$240m to the GEF, approximately a third of which is allocated globally to climate change activities.

Natural Disaster Mitigation

Australia is also active in disaster risk reduction and works to ensure links are drawn between this area and climate change adaptation. Recognising the number of weather related disasters is on the rise and the threat this poses to achievement of the MDGs Australia has committed over A\$20 million (2005-11) for initiatives to assist communities in the Asia-Pacific region build resilience to, and reduce risks from, natural disasters.

Australian support for disaster risk reduction measures is delivered through bilateral aid programs and multilateral organisations and includes support for the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery; the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Asia-Pacific Program; supporting local faith-based organisations in the Pacific to mainstream disaster risk reduction into sustainable development activities; and natural hazard mapping, early warning systems and education programs in the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.