

15 February 2018



**Submission  
to the  
Executive Committee  
of the  
Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage  
associated with Climate Change Impacts**

*We are acutely aware of the impact of climate change on island nations and some of our number have been visiting communities and recording the destruction of shorelines affecting them.*

- *Executive Committee of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, 14 August 2017*

**Introduction**

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference agency for justice, peace and development. We are mandated to undertake advocacy, education, development and humanitarian programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific, and other parts of the world. We produce on behalf of the Caritas Oceania network the Caritas *State of the Environment for Oceania* report each October. This report series documents the human face of climate change and other environmental damage in our region of 'big ocean' states and territories.
2. As a Bishops' agency charged with promoting social and environmental justice, we prioritise the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our community, including future generations whose ability to live on a habitable planet is being compromised by climate change.
3. Our work is informed by Catholic social teaching which provides a robust ethical framework to consider social and environmental questions. Catholic social teaching principles include:
  - **Stewardship:** We are responsible for caring for and protecting the gifts God has given us, including the natural environment, which is a gift for all humanity to share in.
  - **Solidarity:** We are members of one human family, and look out for the wellbeing of others, including future generations.
  - **Preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable:** The needs of poor and vulnerable people in our world must be a priority in public decisions.
  - **The universal destination of goods:** The earth and all it produces is intended for every person. We are responsible for using resources wisely, so that all people in the world and future generations can live in dignity.
4. In June 2015, Pope Francis released a letter, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* addressed to "every person living on this planet", noting the combined social and ecological crisis affecting the earth, which he called 'our common home'. The principles and connections between our social, ecological and economic crises guide our approach to this submission.

## Relevant consultation and dialogue

5. We welcome the five-year working plan of the Executive Committee. We emphasise that the work of the Executive Committee must be informed by face to face encounters and consultation input from people most directly affected in Oceania. In preparing this submission, we spoke with our development partner Tulele Peisa, which is organising the long-term relocation of Carteret Islanders to mainland Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. They say they have not been consulted nor their views represented in global discussions about loss and damage and climate-induced relocation. People involved at policy level need to see what organisations such as Tulele Peisa have been achieving on the ground as a practical response to the loss and damage that climate change is already producing.
6. We emphasise the need for funding of further comprehensive research on internal displacement and the potential for cross border displacement resulting from coastal erosion, sea level rise, slow onset events, in Oceania and other lowlying parts of the globe.
7. For the Suva expert dialogue planned for April/May 2018 to explore “a wide range of information, inputs and views” for facilitating expertise and support to address loss and damage (FCCC/SB/2017/L.5, para 9), we request that this expert dialogue include communities and organisations currently facing loss and damage impacts, such as the Carteret Islanders in Bougainville. Such grassroots communities have already taken charge of their future, and are developing home-grown relocation and adaptation programmes whose wisdom can be shared. The Caritas network can assist with identifying further such expertise.
8. We request that the Executive Committee strengthen cooperation and collaboration with private, public, civil society and faith-based stakeholders throughout Oceania on matters relating to averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. Caritas Oceania and its individual members are willing to work with the Executive Committee in such a way. Caritas Oceania, through its grassroots partners, has a growing research community providing stories, data and analysis on climate change impacts in Oceania. We welcome opportunities to share our findings and recommendations from our *State of the Environment for Oceania* reports each October, and our Pacific-wide talanoa dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

## Priorities for action

9. We are very concerned at the slowness to address loss and damage impacts, given they are only likely to increase in the wake of inadequate mitigation and adaptation measures. As we write, Caritas is responding to Cyclone Gita in Tonga: the strongest recorded storm to have struck the island nation. Long-term damage is expected to infrastructure and food sources, and more of such storms are expected in the Pacific due to climate change. Our community-based research in Oceania also points to lives or well-being being threatened through slow-onset climate change impacts such as food and water shortages arising from drought or long-term weather pattern changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the report, and associated information, is available at: <http://www.caritas.org.nz/state-environment>.

A full review of the Warsaw International Mechanism will not take place til the end of 2019, and UNFCCC responsibility for this life and death issue is in the hands of a voluntary body meeting a couple times a year – with due respect to the expertise and commitment of those who are serving this body. In line with Article 8 of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Warsaw International Mechanism needs to be ‘enhanced and strengthened’ as early as possible; while national climate change plans and policies need to adequately address displacement of population caused by climate change.

10. We suggest the Mechanism can be enhanced by:
  - a) Greater frequency of meetings of the Executive Committee to more urgently address the issues;
  - b) Inviting civil society organisations representing or working with communities most affected by loss and damage as observers to these meetings; and
  - c) providing such organisations and communities with the opportunity to engage in the process and feel part of it.
11. Climate finance to address loss and damage must be elevated as a priority for thematic work, to ensure that climate finance reaches the most vulnerable and is well co-ordinated. We need a better consolidated picture of how this is happening. Our partner Tulele Peisa has emphasised that more support is needed for communities currently feeling the impact of climate change. They say that Governments’ criteria do not address the basic needs of the affected especially women and children. Mechanisms for providing loss and damage finance need to have appropriate safeguards ensure it gets to those most in need – the remotest communities vulnerable to the impacts and disastrous effects of climate change.
12. Thematic work priorities must also address loss and damage impacts and remediation measures with special regard for women, children and indigenous populations. This reflects the importance of these groups as promoted through the UNFCCC’s gender action plan and the local communities and indigenous peoples platform, and ensures an integrated approach in UNFCCC activities to addressing the needs of groups most impacted by climate change.
13. Loss and damage issues must also address promotion and protection of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, especially those most vital to the cultural identity and vitality of particular groups.

### **Other matters**

14. The Paris Agreement refers to enhanced cooperation and facilitation. We recommend particular effort in the following areas to enhance understanding, action and support:
  - (a) Early warning systems, including the provision of reliable and effective communications systems, eg the use of satellite phones for some isolated locations to provide more reliable communications in weather emergencies than current technology used;
  - (b) Emergency preparedness;
  - (c) Slow onset events;
  - (d) Events that may involve irreversible and permanent loss and damage;
  - (e) Comprehensive risk assessment and management;

- (f) Risk insurance facilities, climate risk pooling and other insurance solutions;
  - (g) Non-economic losses;
  - (h) Resilience of communities, livelihoods and ecosystems.
  - (i) Recognition of and appropriate support for traditional knowledge and culturally appropriate ways of providing early warning and emergency preparedness.
15. We trust that the Suva expert dialogue will be conducted in a spirit of talanoa and that the Executive Committee's discussions and engagement will be guided by concern for the communities most affected by loss and damage arising from climate change. Dialogue and decisions must be based on an understanding of integral ecology (recognising the interdependence of all living things, including humans as an integral part of nature) and policy consistency between climate change policy, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Global Compact on Migration (GCM) and the Sendai and Cancun platforms on Disaster Risk Reduction.



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