



CARITAS STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR OCEANIA 2021

## **The Oceania Statement: Towards our future home**

### **A cry from the Earth, and from the poor of Oceania**

Over recent decades, Caritas in Oceania has listened to the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of Pacific peoples on environmental loss and damage to our common home – particularly to the voice of the poor. We have been both saddened and blessed by their sharings. In the last decade, we have amplified their stories through the *Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania* report series. Even before our current crisis, many were living a long, ongoing emergency and unknown future. COVID has exacerbated our concerns, and diverted resources and energy away from longer term, existential threats of inequality, poverty and environmental degradation.

On 28 September 2021, Caritas gathered as members, partners, associates and friends in an online talanoa to hear the hardship, hope and resilience of people facing the intertwined crises of our day. Brought together by the electrical currents of cyberspace, yet woven together by bonds of kinship, by the waves and currents of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, our great Pacific Ocean, by the air currents that circulate above her waters, and most especially woven together by love and compassion for each other and for the most vulnerable.

Our ongoing talanoa comes from the Fala – the ground level of the Pacific, from high mountains and deep rainforests, from gardens and fields, from the coastal edges, from far out to sea, and from the ocean depths. We speak as kaitiaki – guardians and stewards of the Earth, and children of the one God, Creator of all.

We are people of faith and hope. We have faith in a loving and protecting Creator. We have faith in people of goodwill, in the natural and adaptive resilience of our people in their struggle to provide for their families, to protect their homes, to nurture the gifts of the Earth intended for all, including future generations.

We are the Ocean and the Ocean is us, we have lived and thrived here throughout generations, from before time. If we look after Mother Earth, our common home, she will look after us.

*Caritas Oceania is a Catholic humanitarian, development and social justice network operating across the Oceania region. Caritas Oceania comprises Caritas in Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as member churches of the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific. Caritas Oceania is part of the Caritas Internationalis network of 165 Catholic justice, peace and development agencies working around the world.*



## Our Call – Recommendations

We, the Members of Caritas Oceania, having listened to the Signs of our Times in the voices of our people, of science, and of the Earth herself, call on leaders and governments of the world and those participating in upcoming conferences on biodiversity, climate change and the seabed to hear our words.

- Listen – to young people, to elders, to Indigenous and local people who know their place well. Listen to what science and the Earth are telling us. Ensure all these voices are heard and heeded in problem-solving, decision-making and implementation.
- Cut carbon emissions urgently, to minimise sea level rise and more extreme weather.
- Keep alive the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement. It is vital for Oceania.
- Support urgent climate adaptation and relocation, financed by government and partnered by communities.
- Recognise, prioritise and provide for the basic human right to healthy food and safe drinking water. Use technology appropriately to provide clean water where natural sources are unsafe.
- Strengthen knowledge sharing across the region to learn from each other and find common solutions, for example on resilience-building, and early warning systems.
- Strengthen the ability of communities to provide local disaster response, for example in emergency stockpile supplies.
- Develop climate response projects based on sound science, Indigenous and local knowledge, and with the full participation and involvement of affected communities.
- Ban further seabed mining and exploration.

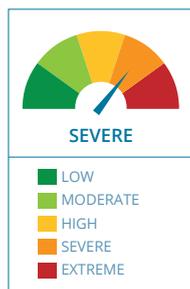
KAREN ANAYA



An ava ceremony in Samoa. Caritas' environmental stories and analysis is based on listening on the Fala – the ground level of the Pacific – to those at the grassroots and coastal edges of Oceania, and to the Earth herself.

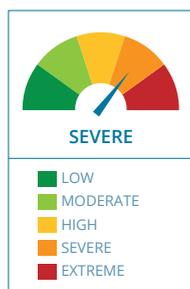
# Caritas Environmental Indicators

Each year Caritas assesses the impact on communities of five key environmental signals: extreme weather; coastal erosion, flooding and sea level rise; access to safe food and water; offshore mining and drilling; and climate finance for the most vulnerable. Our indicators reflect the past year, but also assessment of risk for the year ahead, based on the people we work with. Four of our indicators have moved to 'severe', while the fifth on climate finance has remained at woefully inadequate since 2015.



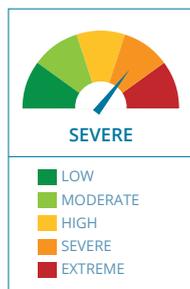
## Extreme weather

Cyclones and heavy rainfall affected many places in the region. Australia and New Zealand both had periods of intense rainfall and flooding in quick succession affecting similar areas. Many places such as Fiji are seeing continuing impacts of cyclones. The weather situation and outlook is more intense and urgent.



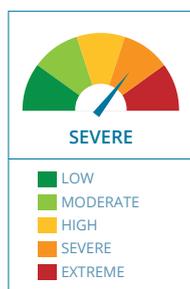
## Coastal erosion, coastal flooding and sea level rise

Coastal flooding and erosion continues to increase, worsened by severe storms, and will only get worse with long-term sea level rise projections. There is no comprehensive monitoring of people affected, nor consistent, coordinated action. People are adapting where they can or moving.



## Access to safe food and water

Food security is severe in many rural areas, as people recover from multiple cyclones or severe weather events. Under COVID, many have returned to homeland rural areas, but they may not have the skills and knowledge to grow well, or rely too much on artificial pesticides and fertilisers. COVID restrictions are impacting supply chains for food and other essential items such as for construction.



## Offshore mining and drilling

Destructive coastal seabed mining continues in Fiji. While deep sea mining has not begun, the International Seabed Authority is under pressure to finalise rules for mining in international waters by July 2023. Companies say the minerals are needed for renewable energy. Communities in Papua New Guinea continue to advocate against seabed mining licences. Caritas maintains its call for a ban on seabed mining and exploration.



## Climate finance for the most vulnerable

The Pacific is not getting climate finance for needs now, and projected need. Processes are long and cumbersome. It is not effective in helping the most vulnerable. Yet our indicators above show the need for adaptation and preparedness is more urgent than ever.



If we look after our land, it will look after us.

– Mina Pomare-Peita (Te Rarawa), school principal, Aotearoa New Zealand

Te Awakairangi, 'the river of great value', Aotearoa New Zealand. From the mountains to the sea, the small yet strong people of Oceania are reconnecting with and restoring their relationship to land, water, ocean and each other.

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