

# We are not drowning! We are fighting!



*Liunga Palu,  
Pacific Communities  
Organiser – Sydney  
Alliance.*

For a majority of our Pacific Islander community, Sunday is usually our Sabbath and day of rest. But on Sunday the 27 November 2015, over a thousand Pacific Islanders marched, sang, chanted, prayed and boldly led (in red) the 45,000 people in Sydney's People's Climate march. Together, we marched in honour and solidarity for our brothers and sister back home in the Islands that are already experiencing the impact of Climate change. We marched as one of many frontline communities, closely behind our friends from our Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander nations.

My name Liunga Palu comes from Tonga my heritage background, whereas I was born and raised in Sydney. Now as a young adult, I've grown to love community organising because it's a space where I've found my voice. And it's also a space that empowers ordinary people like me to act with others on issues that we are angry and passionate about.

Saul Alinsky mentioned in his book *Rules for Radicals* that the organiser needs to work within the experience of his or her people. And so we knew that meant marching in a 'pacific way'. And so an action was organised in the form of a prayer service to take place before the march. This was an intentional action to encourage our Pacific communities to attend the march, seeing as they would be missing out on their usual morning church service! During the march, we organised for our community leaders such as Reverends/ Ministers and Elders to lead; choirs to sing songs and hymns of resilience and hope and all of our participants to turn up in red traditional wear.



*People's Climate March 2015*

For me, marching in the Pacific way was truly unique and a powerful way to make a presence. In our Pacific culture, there's this concept of 'mana'. This is a spiritual quality that translates to power, effectiveness and authority.



*Leaders from 350 Pacific, Climate Pacific Warriors & Matavai proudly marching in their Traditional wear.*

Mana is recognised in the respect one has for someone that uses their power and authority to act in a given situation. My highlight from the march was that I got to experience firsthand the strength and mana of our Sydney Pacific community. I was captivated by the way all our Sydney Pacific members marched in not only their grief and anger, but also with pride and resilience to fight and stand up for our heritage and home islands.

In community organising we start with leaders – those with “a following”. In the lead up to the march, two big meetings were held with community and Uniting Church Pacific leaders and in this space we invited them to share their stories and connect their experiences of grief and anger into political action. We also utilised community organising tactics such as power analysis and mapping our relationships, to help drive turn out. Because this march for our community was about pride and resilience, it was also great to have ex-Parramatta Eels player Jarrod Hayne and other high-profile Pacific leaders endorse the march via social media.

By using community organising we were able to equip our leaders in not only getting the turn out we needed, but also the intended reaction from our own Pacific communities. And this was to make our voice and power/ mana known, in order to advocate on the issue that's threatening our homes and culture.

Generally speaking, our Sydney Pacific communities are not effectively vocal or present in the Australian political landscape when it comes to advocating on public issues. Reasons for this could be anything from fear, shyness or just not having adequate knowledge. However, the Peoples Climate March was



*Banner from the Peoples Climate March*

not only our opportunity to advocate on behalf of our brothers and sisters in the Islands, but also the first effort that Pacific Nations within Sydney worked together to make a political statement to our Australian Government and leaders who'd be attending the Paris negotiations.

And what they heard at the march and what they will keep hearing from our Pacific community is that **"We are NOT drowning. We are fighting"**.

By: Liuanga Palu.