



Edmund Rice Centre

for Justice & Community Education
Awareness ♦ Advocacy ♦ Action



Submission of the House of Representatives Environment and Energy Committee on Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation (Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020

Submitted by Maria Tiimon Chi-Fang on behalf of the Pacific Calling Partnership

I am making this submission as an I-Kiribati woman who now resides in Australia and works as the Pacific Outreach Officer of the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP), an initiative of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education. Since 2006, the PCP has worked with communities in the Pacific, particularly in Kiribati and Tuvalu, to enhance their voices on the impacts of climate change and advocate for urgent climate action.

The climate crisis is the most pressing emergency facing humanity. We need urgent, decisive, and ambitious policies to address this crisis.

I would like to express my support for both the Climate Change Bills as an important step toward authentic and meaningful commitment to climate action at the federal level. The PCP endorses the Bill's long term commitment to emissions reduction through building a durable legal and policy framework for national climate action. This commitment to climate action is vital for the people of Australia as well as the people of Kiribati and the rest of the Pacific.

My country Kiribati is one of the nations most at risk from climate change. We are already experiencing the catastrophic realities of climate change and without strong and decisive action our people may be forced to leave our island home by 2050. We risk losing our land, identity and culture to climate change. It is deeply unjust that as peoples who have contributed the least to this crisis, we in the Pacific risk losing the most from climate change.

For many years our communities in Kiribati and Australia have been calling on our neighbors in Australia and New Zealand to support us in our fight against climate change. We have been calling on Australia to cut down their greenhouse gas emissions, end its reliance on fossil fuels and embrace a just transition towards renewable energy. This is necessary to protect Kiribati and the rest of the Pacific Islands as well as Australia and New Zealand. Climate change is a threat to the whole humanity.

Climate change is not a removed and distant possibility for Kiribati. It is affecting us now. I have witnessed the devastating impacts of climate change in Kiribati firsthand and know that without action this destruction may become our new normal.

When I was a child growing up on a very remote island called Beru in Kiribati my Dad and Mum used to take my siblings and I to a village called Wenete. This is a special place not just for my family but for the whole community on Beru Island. This village is well known for its abundant seafood. My family would spend a few weeks in Wenete. My Dad would teach my older brothers how to fish and passed on what he had learnt from his ancestors, the knowledge and skills of our culture. My Mum

taught us girls ancestral knowledge and skills as well as such as how to weave mats and local thatch. Our parents would also take us to visit our ancestor's sacred places in this village, called Te Baangota or sacred shrine.

In 2010 I went back to Beru. My Dad took me to Wenete and I was shocked and devastated to find that this village which was so important and sacred had been destroyed by strong storm surges and erosion. Many parts of the village had been eroded and one grave yard was completely under water.

I was very saddened to see this precious village and sacred places like Te Baangota destroyed by king tides and the rising of sea water. The coconuts and pandanus trees that were once plentiful and healthy were also gone. The destruction wrought by erosion, storm surges, and king tides has caused the loss of our sacred places and shrines. These places are not just part of us but they **are** us. They are our identity as an I-Kiribati, as an indigenous woman from this unique kaainga (family).

Places for us (I-Kiribati) is profoundly important, we have a very deep connection with the land. Places are unique, special, and integral to us because they give us a sense of belonging. Every time I go back to Beru I would visit what remains of this village and every time I sit under any coconut tree it feels like nothing but nature and the land exists. A coconut tree is not just a mere tree but a home for all creatures. We risk losing this home to climate change.

This is what our people experiencing and facing each day. For the people of Kiribati and many other Pacific Islands, climate change is about survival. People are fighting and struggling every day due to climate change.

The Climate Change Bill is a vital first step for Australia to begin addressing the climate crisis. The PCP supports this opportunity to build a framework for climate action which moves beyond the unhelpful stalemates and division that have characterised Australian climate policy for many years. However, more ambitious commitments, policies and actions are necessary to adequately address climate change. We respectfully make the following recommendations.

- The proposed target of net zero emissions by 2050 is insufficient. Kiribati has been suffering from climate change for many years and does not have the time to wait until 2050. Even before 2050 Kiribati and Tuvalu might be uninhabitable and I strongly believe that Australia can do better than the target under this Bill. A more ambitious target for net zero emissions is possible, especially given Australia's enormous capacity for renewable energy technology. It is also vital that this target aim to keep global warming at 1.5 degrees, aligning to Australia's commitments under the Paris Agreement.
- We strongly recommend that Indigenous people are involved in the proposed Independent Climate Change Commission as a strong and vital voice in consultation and with Indigenous peoples is necessary to build a truly participatory and representative commission.

- We recommend that in framing policy and delivering emissions reductions plans and national climate change risk assessments the Climate Change Commission and the Minister consider the impacts these plans will have on the Pacific Islands, particularly Kiribati and Tuvalu, given Australia is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum and has committed through its Pacific Step Up to support Pacific Islands in their fight against climate change.
- We recommend that the Climate Change Commission particularly focus on consulting and liaising with civil society and non-government organisations working on climate change to gain a diverse and varied perspective on these issues and draft advice that represents national and international best practice.
- In preparing the emissions reduction plans and emission budgets, the Climate Change Commission should particularly focus on how Australia can achieve net zero emissions while prioritising a just transition away from the fossil fuel industry and towards sustainable industries. A just transition which prioritises economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable opportunities and ensures climate action protects all human rights is a vital part of true climate justice.

Photos



Erosion (Wenete village)



Destruction left by king tide (photo taken by Nicola Daley)