

- Australia's Dark Age Climate Policies Continue to Threaten the Pacific
- Fisheries Conservation from a Faith-Based Perspective

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**“If the ocean  
can calm itself, so can you. We are both  
salt water mixed with air”**

~ Nayyirah Waheed



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### **AUSTRALIA'S DARK AGE CLIMATE POLICIES CONTINUE TO THREATEN THE PACIFIC**

Earlier this year Australia took out the [‘Pacific Fossil Award’](#) for the government’s repeated efforts to convince Pacific island countries that it was serious about tackling climate change, *while at the same time* expanding coal exports, and promoting the use of coal abroad. This newly created award by the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN), was given to the Australian Ambassador for the Environment, Patrick Suckling.

Despite being charged with promoting Australia’s climate credentials to our Pacific neighbours, Ambassador Suckling has been known to speak highly of fossil fuel projects such as the Adani-Carmichael coal mine in Queensland. "While the rest of the world is moving ahead to renewable energy, Australia is stuck in the Dark Ages with its reliance on dirty fossil fuels. This is bad news for the Pacific", argues Tuvalu Prime Minister, Enele Sopoaga.

If Adani goes ahead it will be *the world's largest export coal mine*, extracting 60m tonnes of coal each year over at least 60 years. Operating at peak efficiency the mine would be responsible for more than 120m tonnes of CO2 emissions in those years – more than the annual emissions of many

countries! Wesley Morgan from the University of the South Pacific argues that “Australia's pursuit of its own prosperity through the promotion of coal exports directly undermines the security of Pacific island countries”.

In the Solomon Islands for instance - where at least five reef islands have already been inundated - the sea has risen as much as [10mm a year since 1993](#), far outpacing the global average of [3mm per year](#). Tuvalu, in the western Pacific Ocean, will reportedly be [uninhabitable by 2050](#). And the 33 coral atolls and reef islands that make up the nation of Kiribati [could all be underwater by 2100](#). Salt water will almost certainly intrude on the country's fresh water supplies and poison its agricultural soils long before that, making the islands uninhabitable even before the end of the century. To prepare for a future migration, the government of Kiribati has bought [approximately 6,000 acres in Fiji](#) for their climate refugees. But refuge among Fiji's islands may be short-lived. In 2012, Vunidogoloa, a coastal village on Fiji's second largest island, Vanua Levu, [became the first Fijian village](#) that had to be resettled due to climate change.

[In late November](#), Australia's Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg attended the UN climate conference in Germany to tout Australia's leadership on land use and developing low-emission technologies. According to Mr Frydenberg, “Australia has a long and proud history of working with Pacific countries to build climate resilience and reduce the impact of climate-related disasters”. In particular, he cited the government's [\\$300 million spend](#) to help the region avoid and adapt to climate change. Pacific leaders were far from impressed, particularly in regard to Adani. “If you're going to open another coal mine then you are not transitioning [to renewable energy], you are lying to us,” said former Kiribati President, Anote Tong, during the conference.

Interestingly, [Jon Barnett](#), Professor at the School of Geography with the University of Melbourne, warns that while we should not ignore the plight of these Pacific nations, it is just as damaging to assume that their fate is already sealed. “When we deny the possibility of a future for low-lying small islands, we are admitting defeat. This, in turn, undermines the impetus to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and find ways to help communities carry on living in their island homes. It leaves us unable to discuss any options besides palliative responses for climate refugees.”

Sources: [Pacific civil society calls out Australia with new climate award](#), *The Vanuatu Independent*, 21 August 2017 | ['Stuck in the dark ages': Pacific island leader vents after Australia's emissions hit record high](#), Nicole Hasham, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 2017 | [Australia's coal-fired diplomacy burns Pacific friends](#), *The Interpreter*, Wesley Morgan, 4 December 2017 | [Why Adani's planned Carmichael coalmine matters to Australia – and the world](#), Michael Slezak, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2017 | [Why Exceeding Paris Goals Is Life or Death For Pacific Islands](#), Kate Wheeling, *Pacific Standard*, 7 November 2017 | [Australia questioned over coal support](#), *SBS News*, 11 November 2017 | [Pacific Island nations urge world leaders to act as islands expected to sink](#), Matt Young, *News.com.au*, 15 November 2017 | [Don't give up on Pacific Island nations yet](#), [Jon Barnett](#), *The Conversation*, 16 November 2017 | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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## FISHERIES CONSERVATION FROM A FAITH-BASED PERSPECTIVE

I take my hat off to salute the powerful statement made on Sunday 3 December 2017 by Ms Rhea Moss-Christian, chairperson of the Tuna Commission, at the opening of the 14<sup>th</sup> [Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission](#) (WCPFC) in Manila, Philippines. It reminded me of the original interpretation of [Genesis 1:28](#) where humans, the last and greatest of God's creation are given dominion over nature. “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of



the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth”. This implies three clear moral messages:

1. Not only do we not own nature but we are duty bound to respect its integrity.
2. Human beings would use nature only in such a way as to be faithful to the purpose of the Creator.
3. The mandate to exercise dominion or mastery over the natural world is not to abuse. It is limited by a moral imperative to protect and conserve. Genesis 2 and 3 (the story of the forbidden fruit and the subsequent exile from Eden) forcefully makes these three points: Not everything is permitted. There are limits to what human beings may do and, when they are transgressed, disaster follows.

As custodians of a legacy inherited from our forefathers, we must exercise vigilance in its protection and we are liable for loss through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of human beings’ moral responsibility for nature as conceived by the Biblical narrative. The point is that we do not own nature, as [Psalm 24:1](#) says: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it.” We are its trustees on behalf of God who made it and owns it, and for the sake of future generations. The fundamental point is that the marine resources in God’s Creation have their own dignity as God’s masterpieces, and though we have the mandate to use them, we have none to destroy or damage them.

The Biblical narrative teaches a different wisdom with regard to the natural environment and our custodianship responsibility towards it: (a) **reverence** in the face of creation; (b) **responsibility** to future generations; and (c) **restraint** in the knowledge that not everything we *can* do, we should do. The simplest image, and surely the most sensible one, in thinking about our ecological and developmental responsibility, is to see the earth as belonging to God and us as its trustees, charged with conserving and if possible beautifying it for the sake of our great grandchildren not yet born.

What I have shared with you is simply a faith-based view of what ought to be the fundamentals of sustainable fishing. For fishing to be sustainable, it implies, at least from our faith perspective, several fundamental changes to our views for the future development of fishing:

- We must include spirituality, for, without it, it will be a journey to the abyss; it will be like a bus ride to nowhere, ploughing and mowing down everything on its path.
- There are limits to our patterns of production and consumption. Unhealthy consumption of resources and processed foods will, in the end, consume us.
- Our human creativity which enabled us to develop industries and our societies must be held in check by our awareness of the delicate web of life of our environmental ecosystems.
- Fishery policy must take into consideration the wisdom of our indigenous knowledge, traditions and religions. We need to revise how we perceive future development in fishery.



The ecological and developmental condition of our region today, let alone the world, is an affront to one’s moral senses. We simply cannot ignore the growing poverty among our people; the rich few

and the many poor; the depletion of our ocean and land resources; the social ills that are festering within our societies in the Pacific such as violence against women and children; and the increasing isolation of our elderly people, to name a few.

We will need to cultivate a sense that the land and the ocean, and everything in them, have equal right to exist and be here as we human beings have. Perhaps that is the first step to sustainable development for fishery. If we do so, then there is much hope for our region and our world. We are not what we eat, buy or drink. We are truly human when we learn to care for each other, for our land and Ocean.

Let me conclude with a prayer, [attributed to the late Archbishop Oscar Romero](#) of El Salvador:

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen.

*Sources: This article was [written by Reverend Francois Pihaatae](#), who is a member of the Worldwide Fund for Nature Pacific CSO delegation, which is an accredited observer of the Tuna Commission at the 14th annual session of the WCPFC in Manila, Philippines. Rev Francois is the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). Slight edits by Kendall Benton-Collins.*

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