



# Towards new horizons

CARITAS STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
FOR OCEANIA 2020 REPORT



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**Tapa made by the women of Caritas Ma'ufanga, Tonga.**

The Caritas *State of the Environment for Oceania* report monitors five environmental issues affecting the wellbeing of Oceania: extreme weather, rising seas and coastal erosion, access to safe local food and water, offshore mining and drilling, and climate finance. The report is released on 4 October, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Supporting material is online at [www.caritas.org.nz/state-environment](http://www.caritas.org.nz/state-environment). The report is a collaborative project by Caritas Oceania, part of the Caritas Internationalis network of over 160 Catholic aid, development and social justice agencies, working to end poverty, promote justice and restore dignity to all. We aim to gather our stories through talanoa: sharing and discussion to build better relationships and understanding. We seek the good of all and protection of our common home in Oceania, and share stories in a spirit of solidarity.





# Introduction

When Caritas launched last year's State of the Environment for Oceania report, wildfires raging across Australia and Brazil were attracting world headlines. Shortly after Australia's 'megafires' died out in February, Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga, and the coronavirus spread like wildfire around the world.

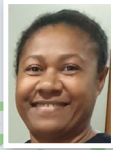
Governments responded in a variety of ways to the global pandemic, with severe impacts in Oceania. Restrictions on international travel and trade produced negative economic consequences, with many places reliant on tourism and remittances from family members overseas. Humanitarian aid and supplies were disrupted and complicated due to travel restrictions and COVID-19 precautions.

However, the pandemic showed how quickly nature can recover when given space, and how quickly governments and institutions can act in a crisis. By April, the International Energy Agency (IEA) had predicted the slowdown in activity could cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by eight percent this year, roughly equivalent to annual reductions needed to keep global warming below the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target. At the same time, OECD governments implemented unprecedented economic and social protection measures, to counteract the economic shocks of the COVID crisis.

Many in Oceania were living in an emergency situation or dealing with trauma before COVID-19. Now, many more face the "long emergency" presaged by our 2014 foundational report – a convergence of multiple crises such as climate change, economic instability, a global pandemic and conflict.

This year's report outlines impact and response through the eyes of Caritas partners and communities in our region.

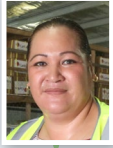
*'Alone we go faster, together we go further'* – Caritas Oceania Forum 2019



**MAVIS TITO, PAPUA NEW GUINEA:**  
*The threat posed by seabed mining is severe. We want it completely banned. We do not want our ocean floors disturbed.*



**SR ROSEMARIE MOLTABUN, VANUATU:**  
*You could see tears coming from their eyes because they had been waiting for tarpaulins.*



**TOM POWELL, AUSTRALIA:**  
*Trauma is like the smoke of the bushfire ... but the real issue is dealing with it. If you don't put out the fire the smoke will reappear.*



**KIRSTY ROBERTSON, AUSTRALIA:**  
*We're encouraging our government to make a significant proportion of aid accessible for community-led adaptation.*

# Oceania voices 2020

Hawaii



**BOORE MOUA, KIRIBATI:**  
*This is my first time seeing such a great destruction caused from natural disaster ever.*



**BISHOP PAUL MEA, KIRIBATI:**  
*We should be able to live on our atolls without being forced to move by environmental issues.*

Tarawa  
Gilbert Islands

Kiritimati

Phoenix Islands

Kiribati



**MALIALOSA TAPUELU, TONGA:**  
*The families would have to go back ... even though their houses weren't safe enough to shelter them.*

Tuvalu

Tokelau

Funafuti

**AMELIA MA'AFU, TONGA:**  
*Deep sea mining sharks have swayed our governments into turning a blind eye.*

Northern Cook Islands

American Samoa

Pago Pago

Cook Islands

Suva

Tonga

Niue

Southern Cook Islands

Papeete

Tahiti

Fiji

Nuku'alofa

Rarotonga

Avarua

French Polynesia



**FR PETERO MATAIRATU, FIJI:**  
*We are in crisis, the world is in crisis at the moment.*



**KOSITATINO TIKOMAIBOLATAGANE, FIJI:**  
*Many things are just done to attract climate funding.*

Kermadec Islands

Auckland



**RICALENE TE WAKE, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND:**  
*It was a sticking plaster to fix up the big cut ... to give us a truck load of water.*

Wellington

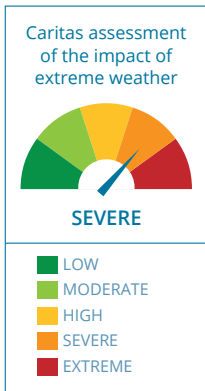
Kaikōura

Christchurch

Chatham Islands

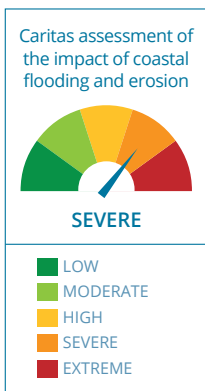
# Caritas assessment of environmental impact 2020

Caritas' assessment of the impact of environmental issues on people in the region is based on stories and data we receive – from official sources, as well as our staff, partners and associates in the region. These pages summarise our assessment – more details appear later in the report and online at [www.caritas.org.nz/state-environment](http://www.caritas.org.nz/state-environment).



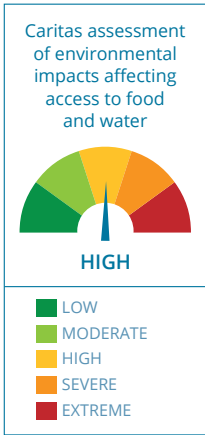
## *Extreme weather*

Our assessment for 2020 remains at **severe**, based on the unprecedented bushfires in Australia; the impact of Cyclone Harold on countries such as Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga and Fiji; and highly unusual weather events in many places.



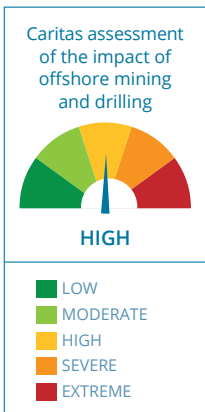
## *Coastal erosion, coastal flooding and sea level rise*

Our assessment has moved from high to **severe**, reflecting increased concern from Tonga, Kiribati, Fiji and Papua New Guinea about sea level rise – more manifest during king tide and storm surge events. Fiji is looking to relocate more than 40 coastal villages in coming years.



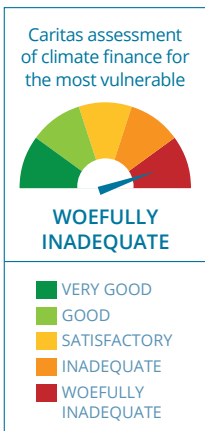
### *Environmental impacts on food and water*

Our assessment of food and water impacts remains at **high**. Both unusual weather events and resource extraction continue to impact poorer populations. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of some poor urban dwellers compared to people who live close to the land and food supplies.



### *Offshore mining and drilling*

Our assessment has moved from moderate to **high**, highlighting the stress that continued efforts to mine the seafloor is placing on coastal peoples. The threat to the seabed exists in both national and international waters.



### *Climate finance*

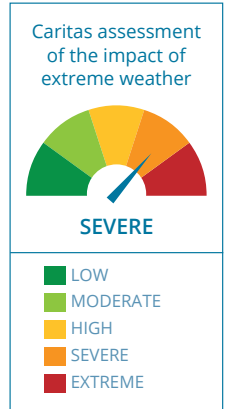
Our assessment of climate finance expenditure for the most vulnerable in Oceania remains **woefully inadequate**. There are moves in the right direction, but still not enough effective investment to provide urgent adaptation at grass-roots level.

# 1 Extreme weather

Caritas' assessment of extreme weather impacts remains at **severe**. Australian bushfires from September to February and Cyclone Harold were the deadliest extreme weather-related events for Oceania. However, extreme weather patterns are a 'new normal'.

'Megafires' across **Australia** directly killed 33 people, but smoke is estimated to have killed 445 more. It was Australia's costliest natural disaster – approaching AUS\$100 billion in overall damages. The eastern Australia bushfire season has lengthened by almost four months since the 1950s to span nearly half the year.

Similarly, the **Tongan** cyclone season now spans September through May, three months longer than it once was. "Cyclone weather is just normalised; it's now part of our daily lives," said Caritas Tonga Director Amelia Ma'afu.



HELEN TAYLOR via ABC.NET.AU (11 JAN 2020)



Youth in Lae, Papua New Guinea pushed wheelbarrows to raise funds for Australian bushfire support. Grassroots fundraising happened in Vanuatu and elsewhere, while Oceania governments sent funds, firefighters, military personnel and engineers in regional solidarity.





Cyclone Harold in April swept 28 people overboard on a **Solomon Islands** ferry before hitting **Vanuatu**, where five people died. Caritas worked through the Diocese of Port Vila to help provide shelter and water for some of the 160,000 people in need.

“Tarpaulins were one of the main things they were waiting for after the cyclone,” said [Sr Rosemarie Moltabun](#) of the Filles de Marie, whose mission house at Melsisi was destroyed. “They were getting wet day and night ... and you could see tears coming from their eyes because they had been waiting for tarpaulins.”

Cyclone Harold also severely impacted **Tonga** and **Fiji**, where it killed one person (see Table on page 8).

COVID-19 complicated the cyclone season. In **Tonga** a COVID-19 curfew was lifted for one night to allow evacuations. Caritas Tonga Project Assistant Malialosa Tapueluelu said, “The next 24 hours they enforced the restrictions again and the families would have to go back from the emergency centres to their houses, even though their houses weren’t safe enough to shelter them.”

In February, unusually strong winds in **Kiribati** destroyed two maneaba. A woman was killed in one when a concrete pillar collapsed. “This is my first time seeing such a great destruction caused from natural disaster ever,” said Boore Moua of the Caritas Kiribati youth group.

In **Papua New Guinea**, heavy rain and flooding caused deaths and displacement in various locations, including a Western Highlands landslide that killed twelve. The heavy rain damaged gardens, homes, livestock, cash crops and water systems in several provinces.

A long drought in the North Island of **Aotearoa New Zealand** threatened water supply for the city of Auckland well into winter. Also, Panguru in the Far North – a community of 400 mainly reliant on rainwater – had to work hard to get emergency drinking water. Community organiser Richalene Te Wake said, “I was grateful to Civil Defence because it fixed the problem right there and then, but it was a sticking plaster to fix up the big cut, the big injury, to give us a truck load of water.”

**Table 1: Extreme weather events July 2019 – June 2020**

Date	Event	Location	Deaths	Other impacts
Sept 2019– Feb 2020	Land fire (brush, bush, pasture)	Australia: New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia	33 direct 445 smoke inhalation	8883 people affected; 3094 houses destroyed; est AUS\$100 billion damages
Dec 2019	Cyclone Sarai	Fiji	1	7780 affected; 2000 people displaced
January 2020	Cyclone Tino	Tuvalu		5500 people affected
January	Cyclone Tino	Nuku District, Fiji	2	3115 people affected
February	High winds	Kiribati	1	Two maneaba destroyed
March	Landslide	Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea	12	1,000 people affected
April	Landslide	Chimbu Province, Papua New Guinea	10	100 people affected
April	Heavy rain and floods; landslides	Various, PNG		60,000 people in Gulf Province displaced by floods; 25,000 people in highland areas displaced by landslides
April	Cyclone Harold	Solomon Islands	28 (ferry disaster)	17,347 houses severely damaged or destroyed
April	Cyclone Harold	Vanuatu	5	160,000 people affected; 90,000 homeless
April	Cyclone Harold	Fiji	1	20,000 people affected; 575 houses destroyed; 1,919 houses damaged
April	Cyclone Harold	Tonga		1400 households affected

Table prepared as accurately as possible, based on EM-DAT data, supplemented by OCHA, relief agencies and news media

## Preparation vital for emergency survival

Disaster preparedness training and pre-positioning emergency supplies is integral to rapid response in cyclones and other emergencies.

Late in 2019, Caritas provided training in water and sanitation and use of water filters (pictured) in Port Vila, **Vanuatu** for emergency staff and volunteers from around the country. Such water filters were vital to supply safe water for Luganville on Santo Island after Cyclone Harold hit the country in April 2020.



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Also this year, Caritas **Samoa** created the [Promoting Resilience through Essentials Pre-positioned for Samoa \(PREPS\)](#) project in partnership with Catholic Relief Services. The two-year, \$500,000 project, financed by the United States

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, will strengthen disaster preparedness in Samoa for pre-positioning of emergency relief supplies at six locations.



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## 2 Coastal erosion and sea level rise

Caritas has raised its assessment to **severe**, reflecting concern from Caritas members in Tonga, Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) in particular.

Impacts of sea level rise are experienced in coastal areas more severely during storm events or king tides (higher than usual high tides). Cyclone Harold in April 2020 coincided with a king tide in **Tonga**, causing significant flooding on the southern coast of Tongatapu and 'Eua.

In January, king tides caused more than 180 people in Deos-Tinputz in the **Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea**, to flee to higher ground, putting up makeshift shelters before receiving tarpaulins.

Prolonged heavy rains and flooding also affected parts of Southern and New Guinea Islands. Caritas PNG assisted with relief supplies in the worst affected areas. "Our coastlines continue to be eroded by high and king tides," said Caritas PNG Director Mavis Tito.

Bishop Paul Mea of Tarawa in **Kiribati** said king tides can flood entire homes so goods are floating around. Since 2005, king tides have often been three metres or more above average sea level. The atolls themselves are no more than 3-4 metres above sea level. "We should be able to live on them without being forced to move by environmental issues," he said.

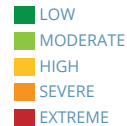
Catholic agencies in **Fiji** are raising awareness of climate change issues for coastal communities, as the government prepares to relocate more than 40 coastal villages due to sea level rise.

But Kositatio Tikomaibolatagane of Caritas Fiji says relocations need to heed the lesson of Narikoso on Ono Island. In 2012, the Fiji military began clearing land to relocate the village of 100 people, threatened by coastal erosion. The project stalled when overseas

Caritas assessment of the impact of coastal flooding and erosion



**SEVERE**



funding stopped and ecological degradation ensued, according to a 2019 case study.<sup>1</sup> This year, three partly completed houses at the new site were destroyed by Cyclone Harold, despite locals warning the houses' location would be susceptible to cyclones.

In **Tonga**, Siliako and Charlene Matangito'aho shared a home with another family in Hihifo on western Tongatapu when Cyclone Harold hit. Radio broadcasts warned them seawater had come inland and was close to reaching their house.

They left for an evacuation centre, but when they returned home found that their house was no longer standing. Everything was washed away by the waves with parts of the house blown into bushes. Charlene said feelings of hopelessness and devastation threatened to engulf them. They slowly began to collect blown off roof tin to make shelter, but the sense of hopelessness was real and difficult to overcome.



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**Siliako and Charlene Matangito'aho (left), receiving assistance from Salote Sakalia (highlight vest) and Suliana Falemeaka of Caritas Tonga, under COVID-19 restrictions.**

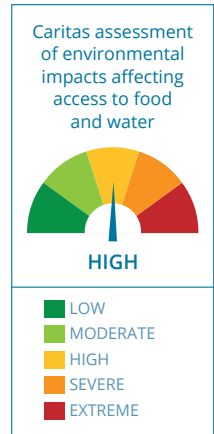
### 3 Food and water

Caritas’ assessment of environmental impacts on food and water is **high**, due to impacts of erratic and extreme weather, resource extraction, and difficulties and inequalities of access. COVID-19 restrictions highlighted some relative vulnerabilities between urban and rural populations, the resilience of people close to local food supplies, and the importance of safe water supplies.

A June 2020 report by Pacific Farmer Organisations on COVID-19 impacts said though sufficient, nutritious local food was generally available in Pacific Islands, it was not always accessible due to low income, loss of overseas remittances, or landlessness in rural areas.

The [need for clean water](#) was highlighted by health emergencies in **Samoa**: the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a measles epidemic in late 2019 that killed more than 80 people and affected over 5,700. Recuperation in rural villages was hindered by lack of access to water and poor hygiene. Water access problems in Samoa include saltwater intrusion, contamination of borewater sources due to lack of maintenance, lack of water in dry spells, and lack of access to a piped water system – especially for vulnerable people inland. In response, Caritas Samoa launched a project to install nine 100,000 litre rainwater harvesting tanks around the main island of Upolu for 114 households, to help in the dry season.

In **Papua New Guinea** (PNG), flooding destroyed food gardens and contaminated water systems in several villages. Caritas PNG Director Mavis Tito said, “COVID-19 restrictions drastically reduced local produce imports to the towns and cities. Farmers were restricted from travelling to urban markets to sell their produce. Prices of local





produce in urban areas skyrocketed. Settlers in the towns and cities reported hunger and starvation because of restrictions on movement.”

COVID-19 also placed stress on food and incomes in **Aotearoa New Zealand**, where Caritas provided a solidarity grant to partner Te Tai o Marokura in Kaikōura. Service Coordinator Hariata Kahu said locals who had never sought help before were “coming in numbers, for support with food, power and rent.”

Reports from both **Papua New Guinea** and **Fiji** highlighted continued impact on food and water supplies by extractive industries, past and present. Kositativo Tikomaibolatagane of Caritas Fiji said mining and forestry were disrupting people’s relationship with land and resources through alteration of ecosystems and natural cycles, loss of flora and fauna, and contamination of water-sources and the ocean.

Caritas Fiji also said COVID-19 travel restrictions hindered access to food and water in urban areas in **Fiji**. Rural people tended to fare better. On Taveuni Island, Caritas partner [Tutu Rural Training Centre](#) sent [trainee farmers home early](#). There was a lot more backyard gardening for food security and short-term cash crops to sustain the centre’s income. “We are in crisis, the world is in crisis at the moment ... and we are equipping our young farmers to be self-sustainable,” said Tutu Director Fr Petero Matairatu.



The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of local production for food security. Toaua Tangaroa (left) and Linda Biira from Teaoaraereke are on the Kiribati Health Champions programme relearning the value of traditional foods and food preparation, supported by Caritas.

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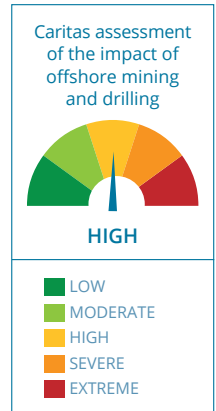
## 4 Offshore mining and drilling

Caritas has raised its assessment to **high**, reflecting the stress being placed on some Pacific communities to protect their oceans and coastal areas from dangers posed by offshore mining.

The planned Solwara1 deep sea mine near New Ireland in **Papua New Guinea** (PNG) failed when Canadian-based Nautilus Minerals Ltd was placed in administration in November 2019, leaving the Papua New Guinea government – a partner in the joint venture – with a loan debt equivalent to about one-third of the country’s health budget.<sup>2</sup>

However, the push to mine the seafloors continues. In July 2020, John Momori of Caritas Kavieng in New Ireland joined with the West Coast Development Foundation to raise community objections to extension of an exploration licence covering the proposed Solwara1 mining site. People attending a Mining Warden Hearing in Namatanai, were surprised to hear they were dealing with a private company, Deep Sea Mining Finance (DSMF), that had taken over assets of Nautilus Niugini Limited in 2018. The ‘new’ company is owned by the two key investors of the, now bankrupt, Nautilus Minerals Ltd.

“The Mineral Resources Authority (MRA) has never informed the



### What’s it all about?

Prospective deep sea miners are interested in three types of mineral-rich environments on the sea floor: mineral nodules, cobalt-rich crusts, and seafloor massive sulphides. Seabed exploration and mining in international waters is regulated by the United Nations’ International Seabed Authority (ISA). Companies exploring or mining in international waters need the sponsorship of a nation state. Pacific countries sponsoring companies in international waters are Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati and Cook Islands.





**Brittle star in a manganese nodule field.**

people of New Ireland about that,” said John Momori. Likewise, only at the Namatanai hearing did the community hear the MRA had extended another licence the community had opposed in 2018.

At a [Caritas PNG panel discussion on seabed mining](#) in March 2020, Caritas PNG Director Mavis Tito said seabed mining poses a severe threat. “There is no legal framework for deep sea mining in PNG, no mitigation plans in place, and locals’ livelihood and traditional/cultural practices are affected. We want it completely banned. We do not want our ocean floors disturbed.”

This year DeepGreen Metals<sup>3</sup> has promoted mining of seafloor polymetallic nodules as less harmful than land-based mining, and necessary for the “green transition”. However, a May 2020 report<sup>4</sup> which reviewed the scientific literature, concluded “that the impacts of nodule mining in the Pacific Ocean would be extensive, severe and last for generations, causing essentially irreversible damage.”

Caritas **Tonga** Director Amelia Ma’afu said, “Deep sea mining sharks have swayed our governments into turning a blind eye to the obvious detrimental environmental and social impacts. Just because we cannot see the seabed does not mean that we should disregard its environmental balance.”

Caritas is calling for seabed mining and exploration to be banned.

## 5 Climate finance

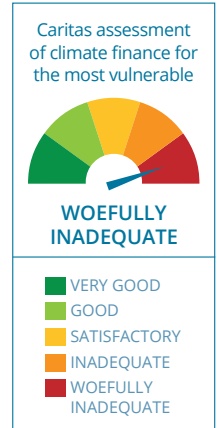
The Caritas assessment of climate finance for Oceania’s most vulnerable remains **woefully inadequate**, as communities on the front line struggle to access funds to adapt to immediate and current climate change impacts. There is still only a trickle of what many frontline Pacific communities need to survive.

The **New Zealand** government increased overall climate change spending by NZ\$12.3 million from 2018/19 to 2019/20.<sup>5</sup> However, direct spending in the Pacific dropped from \$67.5 million last year to NZ\$58.6 million this year. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) says this is because large projects came to an end, and some activities were pushed out due to COVID-19. Caritas welcomes that 57 percent (NZ\$33.4 million) of Pacific funding went towards adaptation, and 33 percent (NZ\$19.6 million) on mixed adaptation/mitigation projects (see table). New Zealand aims to provide \$300 million in climate-related support over 2019–23.

In September, the government of **Australia** announced AU\$500 million of its aid budget for renewable energy, and climate and disaster resilience in the Pacific. “We’re encouraging our government to make a significant proportion of this aid accessible for community-led adaptation,” said Kirsty Robertson, Caritas Australia CEO.

In a joint submission to the Australian government, Caritas Australia and Caritas Tonga said climate finance in the Pacific must empower local communities to access funding and take control of community-level projects. It also needs to ensure participation of churches, faith-based organisations and civil society groups, as they play a key role in targeting vulnerable communities.

Climate finance spending in **Tonga** from 2010 to 2018 has





emphasised infrastructure and energy, rather than strengthening the resilience of people and ecosystems. According to a preliminary financial assessment, less than 12 percent of climate-related development assistance was channelled into adaptation measures other than energy supply.<sup>6</sup>

Caritas and partners’ experience around the Pacific continues to raise questions as to how well and how soon climate finance will provide tangible benefit to those most at risk.

In February, the **New Zealand** government pledged NZ\$2 million to the **Fiji** government’s Relocation Trust Fund to help relocate 42 communities threatened by climate change.

Kositatino Tikomaibolatagane of Caritas Fiji questions how well the money will be used, based on the flawed experience of Narikoso village (see page 10), and that the 42 communities earmarked for relocation have not been named. “Many things are just done to attract climate funding,” he said, “but when the money comes it is used elsewhere according to government’s need and not reaching the very people who are victims of climate change.”

New Zealand’s MFAT says \$0.5 million of their grant will help develop relocation guidelines that provide for human rights; free, prior and informed consent; transparency and accountability. The remaining \$1.5 million is planned as three contributions of \$0.5 million over 1½ years dependent on those issues being adequately addressed.

### ***New Zealand climate finance 2019/2020 (NZ\$ million)***

	Location		% of Pacific funding	Total climate finance	% Total
	Elsewhere	Pacific			
Adaptation	\$10.45	\$33.37	57.0	\$43.82	39.53
Mitigation	\$6.26	\$5.65	9.6	\$11.91	10.74
Both	\$35.57	\$19.56	33.4	\$55.13	49.73
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$52.28</b>	<b>\$58.58</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>\$110.86</b>	<b>100</b>

(Indicative figures from MFAT, 13 August 2020)

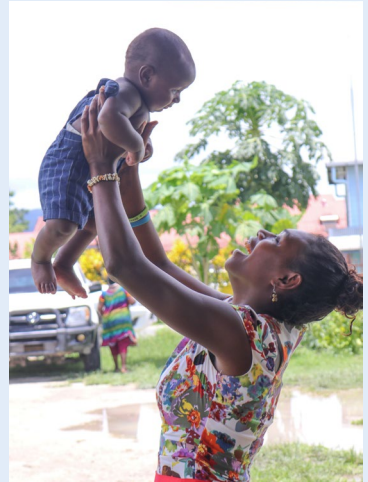
## Funds ‘trickling down’ for Carteret Islands

Since 2015, Caritas has followed the [journey of Carteret Islanders](#) forced to move by sea level rise from their atolls to the mainland in the **Autonomous Region of Bougainville**, in **Papua New Guinea**. In August, Director for the Carterets’ community organisation Tulele Peisa, Ursula Rakova, was waiting for confirmation of 200,000 kina (US\$57,400) from the Bougainville government for family homes and water tanks in the relocation area – ten percent of what’s needed.

“The relocation is urgent,” says Ursula. “We just need to give them shelter, then the agriculture and land use can come after that.”

Ursula says it can be a “long and winding” process to secure even a small amount of climate funding. For example, Tulele Peisa gained approval only in June 2020 for a US\$3000 planning grant for a mangrove planting project, after an initial application in 2017 to the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme.

However, the Carterets and other small islands may benefit from a new Small Grant Fund under the Building Resilience to Climate Change Project, promoting greater climate resilience across five Papua New Guinea provinces since 2016. Five million kina (US\$1.4 million) has been allocated for Bougainville, but the small grant facility for communities is just beginning to be rolled out, with climate change vulnerability assessments due this year.



Mother and child in Buka, Bougainville.

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# Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has thrown the world into turmoil and reminded us of our vulnerability, interconnectedness and solidarity. Governments and international bodies must protect people's health and minimise the fallout from COVID-19, while continuing to step up efforts to address urgent climate mitigation and adaptation. Neither can the need for a green transition be used as a smokescreen to plunge human exploitation to the ocean depths.

In late August, Pope Francis said: "Today we have an opportunity to build something different. ... we can nurture an economy of the integral development of the poor, ... an economy where people, and especially the poorest, are at the centre."

We must use the present crisis to attend to the needs of the poorest, including our Mother Earth and future generations. It challenges us to re-think our relationship to the earth, to each other, and our notion of 'economy', which means 'household management'. Our common home is in need of our care.

## Recommendations

- Rebuild economies that serve people and planet, that value and support local resilience, food production, ecosystems, and communities.
- Governments to remain committed to update stronger Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement by the end of 2020.
- Climate finance must prioritise poorest communities, and empower local communities to access funding, with appropriate transparency and accountability measures.
- Ban further seabed mining and exploration.
- Rest the Earth to restore healthy ecosystems.
- Respect natural cycles and limits. Grow and distribute food sustainably.

# Red Dust Healing: drought, bushfires, then COVID

RICHARD WAINWRIGHT



Bushfires coupled with drought and COVID-19 restrictions [complicated the work of Caritas Australia partner Red Dust Healing](#) in New South Wales (NSW). Founded by Tom Powell, a Warramunga Man from within the Wiradjuri Nation, Red Dust Healing is a cultural healing programme written from an Indigenous perspective.

Tom had been training facilitators on the NSW South Coast before the bushfires hit. He saw the devastation on local communities, already suffering due to the drought, followed swiftly by COVID-19 and its resulting economic instability.

“People are struggling with a lot of anxiety, fear and trauma. Trauma is like the smoke of the bushfire and so you can be affected by smoke inhalation but the real issue is dealing with it. If you don’t put out the fire the smoke will reappear. And the underlying factor to all that is dealing with people’s rejection, with their abuse, neglect, abandonment, the domestic violence, the grief and loss.”

Tom says local residents are helping each other, by reconnecting with each other, their families and communities, working to rebuild their lives and resilience for the future. “When the dust settles on our lives, all you get to keep and take with you is your dignity and integrity, and the love and respect you shared with people,” he said.

## Endnotes

- 1 Amanda Bertana, 2019, “Sea-Level Rise: Valuable Lessons from the Narikoso Village Relocation Project in Fiji” in *Case Studies in the Environment* (2019) 3 (1): 1-7. at <https://doi.org/10.1525/cse.2018.001701>
- 2 Mining Watch Canada; Deep Sea Mining Campaign; London Mining Network July 2019: *Why the Rush? Seabed Mining in the Pacific Ocean*.
- 3 DeepGreen Metals was established by former Nautilus CEO David Heydon and has acquired many former Nautilus subsidiaries and exploration licences in the Pacific.
- 4 Chin, A and Hari, K (May 2020), [Predicting the impacts of mining of deep sea polymetallic nodules in the Pacific Ocean: A review of Scientific literature](#), Deep Sea Mining Campaign and MiningWatch Canada, supported by Ozeanien-Dialog.
- 5 Indicative from Ministry for Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT), 13 August 2020.
- 6 Jeremy Hills, Consultant, United Nations Development Programme webinar: “Perspectives on the Climate Change budget”, June 2020.



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Front: Sunrise from Fagali'i, north-central coast of Upolu, Samoa.

Back: Sunset from Salamumu, south coast of Upolu, Samoa.

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*Caritas Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices stand and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

*Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand acknowledges the mana whenua of Te Ātiawa ki Te Whanganui-a-Tara where our main office is based. We pay respect to all tangata whenua of Aotearoa.*



It is the breath of the Holy Spirit that opens horizons, awakens creativity and renews us in fraternity ... before the enormous and urgent task that awaits us.

— Pope Francis, 17 April 2020



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