

**Pacific Indigenous Peoples Preparatory meeting for the
World Conference on Indigenous Peoples
19 - 21 March 2013, Sydney Australia**

Agenda Item: Climate Change

Paper submitted by the Indigenous Peoples Organisation (IPO) Network of Australia - prepared by National Native Title Council.

Introduction

The Australian Climate Commission recently released a report entitled “The Angry Summer”. According to the report:

- The 2012/2013 summer was the hottest on record with temperature records set in every state and territory;
- More than 70% of Australia experienced extreme temperatures at some stage between December and January;
- Dangerous bushfire conditions occurred in many areas across Australia in the first weeks of January;
- Extreme rainfall occurred over the east coast of Queensland and the New South Wales coast at the end of January triggering severe flooding in many areas;
- Sydney had its highest temperature in 155 years of records; and
- South Australia and Victoria experienced one of their driest summers in decades.¹

The report concludes that the basic features of the climate system have now shifted, changing the conditions for all weather, including extreme events. The earth has warmed by 0.8°C over the last 100 years, which has led to increased air and sea surface temperatures, rising sea level and more moisture in the atmosphere.²

Whilst Australian political parties bicker about the response to climate change, Indigenous peoples need to proactively participate in adaptation and mitigation activities to protect tradition, culture and country.

Australia has always been a land of extremes but climate change is making these extremes worse and this remains a constant concern and challenge for Australia’s Indigenous Peoples. The special relationship that Australia’s Indigenous Peoples have with their land means that their capacity to adapt to new environments is more

¹ Australian Climate Commission, 2013, *The Angry Summer*, [www.http://climatecommission.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Key-Facts-The-Angry-Summer-web.pdf](http://climatecommission.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Key-Facts-The-Angry-Summer-web.pdf) [accessed 6 March 2013]

² Ibid.

complex. For some it will mean being unable to access traditional homelands and forced repatriations will occur due to submersion or inundation. This will impact heavily on the health and wellbeing of whole communities.

The International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change held as part of COP17 in Durban in November and December 2011 calls for the “free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples to ensure their full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in policies and programs for climate change mitigation at all levels”.

Australian action on climate change has recently been introduced through its ‘Clean Energy Future’ legislation – legislation which includes a carbon farming initiative, a number of funds dedicated to climate change mitigation and the beginnings of a carbon trading scheme – locally known as the ‘Carbon Tax’.

The Carbon Farming Initiative allows Indigenous peoples to participate in programs on country such as savannah burning, feral animal control or sequestration offsets. Such projects not only allow Indigenous peoples the opportunity to control what happens on country, but also to benefit economically. However, there has been little action in the way of a coordinated approach to better prepare Australia’s Indigenous communities, particularly in remote areas in these initiatives.

It is critical for Indigenous peoples to be fully and effectively engaged in responses to climate change and that they are fully able to participate in initiatives that will provide opportunities for their families and communities.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

1. That all States be urged to ensure the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in initiatives to combat climate change; and
2. That Indigenous peoples be supported to participate in international fora under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change