

The year under review witnessed a plethora of regional meetings, on a range of important issues but with variable outcomes. The meetings included the second major fisheries conference, the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, the annual South Pacific Forum, the first ever Pacific Islands Leaders Summit held in Japan, and the Thirty-Seventh South Pacific Conference celebrating the organization's fifty-year existence. Two issues that continued to disturb regional governments were the shipments of radioactive materials across the Pacific en route from France to Japan, and the prospect of nuclear waste being stored in the Pacific. Australia's credentials in the region plummeted to new depths in 1997. The first incident concerned a leaked document, prepared by Australian officials, which contained offensive references to island governments and leaders. In addition, Australia once again showed itself at odds with its island neighbors over the need for extensive and binding cuts to greenhouse gas emissions to combat global warming.

The Second Multilateral High Level Conference on Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Central and Western Pacific (MHLC2) was held in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands, in June. This was a landmark meeting that demonstrated a concerted attempt by fishing nations and Pacific Island states to define an approach for the joint management of regional fisheries stocks. Of course, the key players have

different perspectives. Pacific Island nations are keen to protect their jurisdiction over highly migratory stocks within their exclusive economic zones and to increase the financial returns from distant-water fishing nations. For their part, those nations want to secure their access to the region's stocks and exercise some control over resource management.

As seventy per cent of the world's fishing grounds have been over-exploited or depleted, both sets of parties have a stake in the long-term sustainability of the relatively abundant tuna stocks in the Pacific. With this end in mind, the Majuro Declaration committed all parties to cooperatively establishing a legally binding conservation and management mechanism within three years. Specific details of these measures are to be drafted by technical working groups and submitted to the MHLC3 in mid-1998. Island states viewed the conference as a success because they received recognition of principles such as sovereignty within exclusive economic zones and the need for special assistance to small island states for monitoring, control, and surveillance. Nevertheless, a number of potentially divisive issues were not addressed by the conference, and future negotiations promise to be challenging (Tarte 1997).

Another positive sign of progress in regional cooperation was the outcome of the Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting held in Cairns, Australia, in July. The ministers developed a comprehensive rolling Action Plan that

encompasses economic reform, public accountability, investment and tariff policies, and multilateral trade issues. They will submit annual reports on their progress in implementing the plan. They agreed to establish national economic reform strategies, which include measures to ensure that delivery of essential services is maintained and potentially adverse social impacts are minimized. A number of principles for best practice accountability on the part of governments were also adopted. These included government accounts to be promptly audited and publicly available, government contracts to be openly advertised and competitively awarded, and contravention of financial discipline to be promptly disciplined. The ministers decided to pursue open, liberal, and transparent investment policies consistent with APEC nonbinding investment principles. They also endorsed the work of the Forum Regional Security Committee to improve coordination between countries to counter unwanted financial activities, especially the kind of financial scams that have been widespread in recent years.

Unfortunately, the work of the Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting was completely overshadowed by the publication of a confidential Australian government briefing paper that contained disparaging assessments of island governments and their leaders (Australian Delegation Brief 1997). This caused a diplomatic sensation and promises to undermine Australia's relations with its diminutive neighbors for years to come. The 93-page document, marked "Australian Eyes Only," was left lying on a table in the foyer at

the meeting. It was picked up by two journalists, and excerpts of its more lurid contents were subsequently splashed across the regional media, causing embarrassment and dismay among regional governments. Pacific Island countries are accustomed to Australia making harsh critiques of their economic performance and financial management. To some extent they acknowledge these shortcomings, as evidenced in their preparedness to participate in the ministers' meeting and work together on reform strategies. However, nothing could have prepared them for the scathing tone of the document.

Its authors engaged in simplistic stereotyping of island economies, grouping the Pacific nations into crude categories according to perceived economic standing. Nauru and the Cook Islands were thus relegated to the sub-heading "Bottom of the Heap," while the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia were dismissively labeled "Imprudent Micronesians." Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands were subject to a colorful characterization of their own: "Melanesian Mayhem." Microstates deemed to be adequately "managing" their affairs for the time being included Niue, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Palau. Only Tonga and Samoa received praise as "Prudent Polynesians," while Fiji was singled out as the "Best of the Bunch." The plight of the less fortunate microstates was blamed squarely on leadership factors, including allegations of corruption, economic mismanagement, and a failure to implement reforms agreed by Forum members and by those receiving conditional

development loans. The report's authors could not resist making sweeping generalizations such as: "Pacific leaders will continue to flirt with . . . quick-fix, easy money schemes and over-exploitation of natural resources" (Australian Delegation Brief 1997, 42). Overall, the analysis lacked nuance, and any serious recommendations grounded in valid concerns were overshadowed by the sensationalist and often patronizing tone.

Aspects of the report that caused most indignation around the region involved gratuitous denigration of the personal style and traits of several island leaders, including their drinking habits and behavior under the influence of alcohol. In particular, the authors focused on politicians who had exhibited hostility toward Australia. Papua New Guinea's then finance minister, Chris Haiveta, was described as being "combative towards Australia," while Vanuatu's commerce minister, Barak Sope, was accused of having demonstrated Marxist and anticolonial sentiment. Similarly, Fiji's then finance minister, Berenado Vunibobo, was portrayed as "temperamentally volatile" and "given to Third World posturing against Western colonialism." The paper also took potshots at New Zealand for its alleged efforts to compete with, or even "under-cut," Australian policy in the region. The prime minister of the Cook Islands, Sir Geoffrey Henry, came in for a mixed appraisal that charged him with bringing his nation to the brink of economic catastrophe. While characterized as "articulate and hardworking," he was also considered to be a heavy drinker,

"boastful and vain." The timing of this diatribe on Henry was particularly unfortunate in view of his role as host of the forthcoming South Pacific Forum.

How did this monumental diplomatic blunder come to pass and who was to blame? Clearly there was negligence on the part of junior treasury officials who left the briefing document lying in a public place. Yet the breach in security also stemmed from the failure to give such a sensitive document a high enough security classification to prevent such a leak. It was rated "confidential" but, in view of its content, "secret" or "top secret" would have been more prudent. Of more concern was the fact that personalized, derogatory, and intemperate language was employed in a formal written paper. The document was prepared by an interdepartmental working group as a briefing for Australian Treasurer Peter Costello prior to the meeting of regional economic ministers. Sources thus included the Treasury, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, AusAid, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Australian intelligence agencies. However, the main analysis appears to have been provided by the Office for National Assessments, an intelligence agency that reports directly to the prime minister and the cabinet.

The Australian government's response was to launch an investigation into the lapse in security and to assert that the document was the work of a limited number of public servants and in no way reflected official government views. Although the contents of the paper were acknowledged to be

deeply insulting, the government issued no formal apology to island leaders over the incident and instead merely expressed regret. As journalist Jemima Garrett concluded, a more appropriate official response would have been to “unambiguously repudiate the florid language and unprofessional nature of the work” (*PIM*, Sept 1997, 54). The matter was raised during the leaders’ retreat at the Forum, where island leaders politely advised Prime Minister Howard to exercise greater control over officials responsible for writing such papers and to tighten security to prevent leaks.

Pacific outrage over the leak stemmed not so much from a belief that the assessments of island economies and leaders were flawed, but that the tone indicated an attitude of superior contempt for many regional microstates and their leaders on the part of Australian public servants, and possibly the government itself. Pacific Islanders have long suspected Australia of harboring neocolonial feelings of superiority bordering on racism, and this incident merely served to confirm such suspicions. Although the paper was never meant to go public, its attacks on individual leaders were anathema to those who preach the consensual and face-saving style of the Pacific Way. Ironically, while one of the aims of the briefing was to identify and manage regional politicians who are not well disposed toward Australia and its assumed role as regional leader, the leaked paper itself provoked an unprecedented backlash against Australia. The resulting atmosphere of distrust will certainly not help to further Australia’s campaign to promote and

direct economic reform in the region. Diplomatic relations with particular countries will also be set back as a result of key ministers and heads of state still smarting from the derisive critiques in the document. The net effect of this sorry episode for Australian diplomacy can be summed up as “how to lose friends and alienate people.”

The Twenty-Eighth South Pacific Forum, held in Rarotonga 17–19 September, focused on the themes of Reform, Human Values, and Togetherness. However, “togetherness” was probably not the sentiment uppermost in the minds of leaders who were still reeling from the abuse doled out in the Australian document a few months earlier. The standoff caused by Australia’s intransigence on greenhouse gas cuts further soured the atmosphere, but more of that later. One issue the leaders could agree on was that the Forum Economic Ministers’ Meeting and its Action Plan deserved to be applauded, and a high priority was accorded to facilitating its implementation. The successful conclusion of the MHL2 fisheries conference was also welcome, and the Forum endorsed the concept of a vessel-monitoring system to keep track of the vessels of distant-water fishing nations. The leaders expressed satisfaction with the report by a Forum delegation to New Caledonia on progress toward a 1998 referendum on self-determination, but urged that events continue to be monitored until a durable solution is found to the territory’s political status. The Forum was particularly encouraged by the signs of progress in restoring peace to the island of Bougainville and

announced its readiness to assist Papua New Guinea wherever possible in bringing about lasting peace.

The 1997 Forum reiterated its concerns over continuing operations of the Johnston Atoll Chemical Agents Disposal System. The facility was designed specifically to incinerate chemical weapons from Germany, Okinawa, and Solomon Islands, but not from the United States. In 1985 the US Environmental Protection Agency issued a ten-year permit for its operations. The United States began destroying chemical weapons at Johnston in 1990, despite vociferous protests from Pacific Island nations. They opposed the facility from the outset due to concerns over the impact of its untried prototype technology on the marine environment. In 1991, US President George Bush gave a verbal promise to Pacific Island leaders that the disposal system would be dismantled in 1995, when its permit expired. That commitment has not been honored and now the US Army is seeking to extend the life of the facility up to the year 2005, mainly because the program has been plagued by problems that have forced the periodic shutdown of operations. By June 1997, the US Army had destroyed 67 percent of the stockpile at Johnston Atoll and estimated that it only needed three more years to complete the program. It is therefore unclear why a permit is being sought for an additional eight years. Fears are held that if the army gains a lengthy extension it may use the facility to incinerate chemical weapons currently awaiting destruction on the US mainland. The Forum thus asked, once again, that the facility be “permanently

closed when the current program of chemical weapons and agent destruction was completed” (Forum Secretariat 1997, para 38).

The Forum leaders adopted the Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation, which recognized the region’s vulnerability to natural disasters, environmental damage, and unlawful challenges to national integrity. The declaration reaffirmed the commitment of Forum leaders to taking a comprehensive, integrated, and collaborative approach to dealing with broadly defined threats to security. They also acknowledged that security threats could emerge with little warning, and the region therefore needs to develop mechanisms to facilitate consultation in order to respond quickly to threats. However, recognizing that it is best to stop conflict from arising in the first place, the Forum leaders will focus on developing preventive diplomacy, including mediation by the Forum Regional Security committee, the Forum secretary-general, other eminent persons, and fact-finding missions. They also agreed that procedures be developed to facilitate responses by the region’s disciplined forces. Attention to regional disaster management is particularly timely in view of the spate of devastating cyclones in the region and the catastrophic drought taking its toll in Papua New Guinea.

There have been mixed appraisals of the inaugural Pacific Leaders’ Summit held in Tokyo on 13 October. The Japanese prime minister hailed it as an “epoch making event,” but others dismissed it as a low-key meeting that failed to scale new heights.

There is no doubt of Japan's importance to the Pacific Islands in terms of trade, aid, and fisheries. Japan, too, wants to maintain favorable relations with the Pacific microstates to ensure its continued access to the region's natural resources and to curry the favor of its eight voting UN members. According to Japan, the summit's objective was to explore new ways of achieving economic self-sufficiency in the Forum island nations. Not surprisingly, the substance of many papers presented by island leaders was to build a case, and present a wish list, for further overseas development assistance. This was probably a useful exercise in identifying development priorities. However, the joint declaration issued at the end of the meeting mainly restated well-known concerns over integration into the global economy, sustainable development, and the greenhouse phenomenon. It was also punctuated with polite references to Japan's constructive role in providing support for the development and stability of Forum island countries. Yet Japan made no new commitments on the aid front (Joint Declaration 1997). It remains to be seen whether the Tokyo summit will produce any more than the fuzzy feelings of friendship and goodwill evidenced at the 1990 Honolulu summit, presided over by US President George Bush, which has thus far failed to yield tangible results (Finin and Wesley-Smith 1997).

On 6 February 1997, the South Pacific Commission celebrated its golden jubilee, marking fifty years of service to the Pacific Island countries and territories. Commemoration activities were held in Noumea, which hosts

the commission's offices, but the main event was the Thirty-Seventh South Pacific Conference, staged in Canberra, which was host to the original agreement setting up the organization. The mood of the October conference was deliberately upbeat as the director-general (formerly secretary-general), Bob Dun, spoke of increased donor confidence and improved staff morale since he took over management in 1995. He also took pride in the fact that the commission had succeeded in balancing the books and consolidating its financial situation. His optimism was vindicated to some extent by Great Britain's surprise decision to rejoin the organization after having formally withdrawn in 1995 due to dissatisfaction with management. Dun was also favorably evaluated and reappointed for a further two years. On a disappointing note, however, he did admit that the proportion of Pacific Islanders employed by the organization had fallen from 45 to 35 percent during his term in office. The main decision of note taken by the conference was to change the organization's name to Pacific Community in order to better reflect the more egalitarian nature of its membership and broadened geographic scope. Today twenty-six countries, territories, and associated states are members of the Pacific Community with each having an equal vote regardless of size or status.

Concerns over the transport by sea of plutonium and high-level nuclear waste through the Pacific Ocean continued unabated in 1997, despite public relations efforts by the companies engaged in the shipments to persuade regional nations of their

safety. In February, the *Pacific Teal* carried a shipment of forty canisters of vitrified high-level waste through the Pacific en route to Japan from France. The ship is owned by Pacific Nuclear Transport Limited, whose fleet includes four other licensed irradiated nuclear fuel carriers: *Pacific Crane* (formerly *Akatsuki Maru*) *Pacific Pintail*, *Pacific Sandpiper*, and *Pacific Swan*. The shareholders in Pacific Nuclear Transport are the same companies as are engaged in reprocessing nuclear fuel: British Nuclear Fuel, the French COGEMA, and Japanese nuclear fuel utilities.

Caribbean and Latin American nations have issued regional statements indicating they do not want high-level wastes transported through their waters. Although several nations and the secretariat of the South Pacific Forum have expressed their concern at the shipments entering the region's exclusive economic zones, Greenpeace argues that the Pacific Ocean has now been chosen as the main route for the shipments because it is believed to be the path of least resistance. Politically, the way was prepared for the *Pacific Teal*'s voyage by a delegation of nuclear industry officials from France, Japan, and Britain. In January the delegation visited Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji in order to reassure key regional governments of the safety of high-level waste shipments in their vicinity. In particular, they emphasized that their ships met with the highest safety rating of the International Maritime Organization, with measures including 25-centimeter-thick stainless steel containers, double hulls to withstand colli-

sion damage, twin engines, anticollision radar, and enhanced buoyancy to prevent vessels from sinking.

In March, another opportunity for convincing doubtful Pacific officials of the safety of the shipments presented itself at the Regional Seminar on Nuclear Issues organized by the Forum Secretariat. Richard Rawls, head of the Transport Safety Unit of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), gave a lengthy presentation outlining the comprehensive regulations governing the safe transport of radioactive materials by sea. He dazzled the audience with an impressive array of overheads, diagrams, and statistics demonstrating the meticulous standards applied to nuclear shipments. The agency's regulations were first established in 1961 and have been revised on several occasions, the last being in 1996. In particular, Rawls emphasized the rigorous testing undergone by the "packages" of stainless steel containing nuclear materials. These packages are subjected to extreme trials, including thermal tests of up to 800 degrees Celsius, immersion up to 200 meters, punctures, drops of 9 meters, and collisions at high speed. In addition, ships licensed to transport irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium, and high-level waste must meet standards required under an INF Code concerning fire and radiological protection, temperature control, cargo securement, electrical supplies, and emergency planning.

Later in the year, the consortium of French, British, and Japanese nuclear interests extended invitations to academics and journalists from the Pacific to participate in a "visual and hands-

on" Evidence Information Tour. This included guided tours of nuclear reprocessing plants and shipment facilities in the United Kingdom and France, as well as discussions with academics and representatives of the nuclear industry. Company officials were at pains to point out that they maintain standards at least as strict as those recommended under IAEA regulations. The industry has also adopted an environmental angle to their public relations exercise that has considerable persuasive value for Pacific Island states, notably that, unlike fossil fuels, an advantage of nuclear power is that it does not contribute to global warming.

Pacific Islanders have learned to exercise a healthy skepticism for assurances made by military and scientific authorities in view of their experience of nuclear testing and its lasting consequences for health and the environment. It is disconcerting that, despite the rigorous standards regulating transport, Richard Rawls has admitted that if a "package" were lost in the depths of the ocean no attempt would be made to retrieve it. Packages are only designed to withstand immersion in 200 meters of water, yet Rawls argued that this is sufficient for retrieval of packages lost on the continental shelf where most fishing takes place. However, as Tony Slatyer from the Forum Secretariat pointed out, perception counts for at least as much as reality in relation to nuclear issues. When France resumed nuclear testing, though it posed no direct threat to popular tourist destinations, tourism in the Pacific experienced a serious downturn. Slatyer asked the audience, rhetorically, to imagine the potential

impact on the multibillion-dollar tuna industry if a canister of plutonium or high-level nuclear waste were to be irretrievably lost in the Pacific Ocean.

These concerns were reflected in the section of the Forum communiqué addressing radioactive waste shipments and accident liability (Forum Secretariat 1997, para 32). For some time now the Forum has been pressing for the revision of international nuclear liability conventions to ensure that all contingencies are adequately covered. The Forum "expected" that "shipping states agree to promote the safety of the material and provide compensation for any industries harmed as a result of changes in the market value of the region's fisheries and tourism products in the event of any accident." The Forum also noted the adoption of the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage, especially its provisions for compensation to victims of transboundary damage and recognition of coastal state jurisdiction over actions concerning damage within their exclusive economic zones. The Forum noted that the nuclear industry had been more transparent and forthcoming with information about shipments in recent times. Nevertheless, they continue to be secretive about the planned routes for shipments, allegedly to minimize the threat posed by terrorist attacks on the cargo. This justification is far from reassuring. There is a need for continued vigilance by the region, as another nuclear waste shipment through the Pacific was planned for early 1998, and many more are expected to follow over the coming years.



Notwithstanding the perceived benefits of nuclear power over other forms of energy, Pacific Island nations are aware that the developed world is still struggling to find solutions to the problem of permanent safe disposal of nuclear waste. A "not in my backyard" rejection of nuclear waste sites is widespread among communities in North America, Europe, and some East Asian nations. Although the region demonstrated its determination to prevent the export of nuclear waste to Forum island nations by adopting the 1995 Waigani ban on such activities, proposals for nuclear waste storage sites in the Pacific were still being pursued in 1997.

An American nuclear waste entrepreneur, Alex Copson, has been at the forefront of efforts to set up a storage site for spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste in the Pacific. Despite opposition from the US government and the South Pacific Forum, in January the waste site promoters proceeded to submit draft legislation to the US Senate. The draft was written by Nuclear Disarmament Services, a joint US-Russian consortium, of which Copson is director. It proposed to finance, develop, and commercially operate a facility to store spent nuclear fuel from Russia and the United States. The storage capacity of the facility was envisaged to be a minimum of 200,000 metric tons. The designated sites were Wake Island or Palmyra Atoll or both. The Clinton administration still rejected the plan on the grounds that it was in conflict with existing legislation including the National Environment Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, and procedures of the Nuclear Regulatory

Commission. The 1997 Forum reiterated its concern over private interests contemplating nuclear storage sites in the Pacific, but the Forum was encouraged by the reaffirmed opposition to such plans on the part of the United States.

In the face of long-standing regional opposition, the Republic of the Marshall Islands also continued to entertain the possibility of setting up a low-level nuclear waste storage site. In early 1997, Marshall Islands officials accelerated plans to implement a feasibility study for a waste facility, including the identification of atoll communities willing to host such a site. In May the government signed a contract with a US company, Babbit and Wilcox Nuclear Environmental Services Incorporated, to undertake the study. However, the contract was extremely one-sided in terms of liability and, pending the outcome of the feasibility study, the contract contained a commitment to allow the company exclusive rights to build and operate a nuclear waste repository. In addition, the nuclear waste scheme incurred the wrath of the US administration and many congress members, thus threatening to undermine the Marshall Islands' sensitive negotiations for increased compensation to nuclear victims and for economic assistance once the Compact of Free Association expires in 2001. Recognizing that the costs of a nuclear waste site were, for the time being, outweighing its potential benefits, President Imata Kabua unilaterally imposed a freeze on the feasibility study in June. Nevertheless, the nuclear waste scheme remains a last-resort option to generate revenue

for the Marshalls and could be revived at a later date.

The threat of climate change did not recede from the consciousness of Islanders in 1997. At the end of June the world's small island countries issued another plea for urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the second United Nations Earth Summit held in New York, highlighting the fact that their very survival was in jeopardy. In August the third South Pacific Regional Environment Program's Climate Change and Sea Level Rise meeting took place in Noumea, once again focusing on raising awareness of the likely consequences of climate change and the special needs of Pacific Island countries. As far as the annual South Pacific Forum was concerned, the ante was raised for discussions of climate change at a prior meeting held by the smallest island states, including Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, Niue, and the Cook Islands. They passed a resolution, earlier endorsed by the Association of Small Island States, calling on developed countries to cut their greenhouse gas emission levels to 20 percent lower than 1990 levels by the year 2005. The group also made a powerful statement on the moral imperative to arrest rising sea levels: "The avoidable destruction of entire communities and countries and their cultures contravenes the basic right of every state, large and small, rich and poor, to exist. This cannot be tolerated by the family of nations" (*Pacific News Bulletin*, Sept 1997, 1).

Climate change was thus set to be the most contentious issue at the 1997 Forum, with island nations already well aware of Australia's resistance to

the introduction of uniform and binding greenhouse gas emission targets on developed nations at a forthcoming climate change meeting in Kyoto in December. From the outset, the Australian government was determined to prevent the Forum's annual communiqué from including any wording that endorsed binding greenhouse gas emission reductions, as this would undermine their negotiating position in Kyoto. Due to an impasse over this issue, officials charged with drafting the communiqué failed to achieve an outcome acceptable to both the island states and Australia. It was left to the leaders to thrash out an agreement at their annual retreat, but Australia's prime minister, John Howard, refused to modify his hardline stance.

Howard ultimately won the battle of wills, and the final wording of the communiqué could scarcely be termed a consensus, given that the strong views of the fourteen island leaders were watered down to accommodate Australia's position. As a result, the communiqué's annex on climate change merely "recognized and endorsed the deep concerns regarding the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on rising sea levels on all Forum members" and "urged" countries to make "additional efforts in meeting commitments" under the Framework for Climate Change Convention. It also "recognized" that parties to the Kyoto conference could be expected to adopt different approaches, effectively endorsing Australia's campaign for special treatment in Kyoto. Howard had highlighted the need for rapidly industrializing countries like China and India to join emission reduction

targets along with developed countries. This recommendation, too, was included in the Forum communiqué (Forum Secretariat 1997, Annex).

The media hounded Howard over his apparent insensitivity to valid Islander concerns over global warming. Howard was unrepentant, stating that he rejected any imposition of binding greenhouse gas cuts that would damage Australian investment and cost jobs. Asked if he thought the Australian economy was more important than the very existence of low-lying atoll nations, Howard retorted that such "apocalyptic views" were "exaggerated" (*Australian Financial Review*, 19 Sept 1997, 11). He also argued that the scientific debate over the effects of global warming was still divided and far from conclusive. Australia's foreign minister, Alexander Downer, made efforts to impress on island nations that their future was very much linked to Australia's well-being. He implied that any greenhouse gas reduction targets that harmed the Australian economy would inevitably affect Australia's ability to continue providing aid to the region. Still in defensive mode, Downer also alluded to Australia as a significant provider of aid for environmental projects in the Pacific Islands. Clearly, Australia's size and importance as an aid donor in the region enabled its views to prevail at the Forum; it would not be so easy for Australia to throw its weight around at the Kyoto climate change conference.

All year Australia had been plotting strategies and lobbying likely allies in preparation for its stand against uniform binding greenhouse gas cuts being decided at the meeting of parties

to the Framework for Climate Change Convention in Kyoto in December. In defiance of European Union policy, Australia campaigned strongly to have differentiated reduction targets for countries depending on their economy's reliance on fossil fuel production and exports. Australian Environment Minister Robert Hill made it plain in Kyoto that, having a fossil fuel intensive economy, Australia would not sign an agreement that would damage its economic interests. In issuing this ultimatum, Australia held the meeting's achievement of global consensus hostage to its own narrow interests. Evidently, given the relatively small absolute contribution Australia makes to global greenhouse gases, the meeting reluctantly decided to cave in to the blackmail.

The end result was a diplomatic victory for the Australian government. Not only did Australia avoid being committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it was granted permission to increase such emissions by 8 percent between the base year of 1990 and 2010. Australia was one of only three developed countries to obtain such a dispensation, whereas the European Union, the United States, Canada, and Japan were committed to achieving reductions of 6–8 percent, and developed countries on average were obliged to reach reduction targets of 5.2 percent. Australia and the United States pushed for the progressive involvement of developing countries in meeting reduction targets as their emissions are increasing exponentially in tandem with industrialization. By contrast, Europe believes that developed countries ought to set an example first.

This view held sway at Kyoto, and no targets were set for developing countries. The Pacific Island nations would have been relieved that binding targets for cuts to greenhouse gas emissions had finally been established. Nevertheless, the outcome was disappointing given that small island states had been pressing for targets at least fifteen percent higher than those agreed to in Kyoto, and for these targets to be achieved within a shorter time frame. Sea-level-rise refugees may have to become a fact of life before Islander concerns on global warming are taken seriously.

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